

## Interview with Ernestine S. Heck

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

ERNESTINE S. HECK

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*Q: Ernie and I are old friends going back from Vietnam days and thereafter. I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Ernie, let's start sort of at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family.*

HECK: I was born in 1940 in Clatskanie, Oregon. At that point it probably had 400 people. I was born in a little hospital which was over the bank. My family had come to the big city. They were posted out in a place called Silver Lake, Oregon, which is out in what we call the high desert of eastern Oregon, where my father was the principal of what amounted to basically a six-room school comprising grade school and high school. We had come home, my mother had come home to have the baby with her parents. I grew up in Oregon. I had never lived in a town of more than 250 people till I went away to college, although I had lived on the outskirts of these metropolises like Clatskanie. I lived in what amounted to an idyllic situation, I thought. My father remained a school teacher throughout his life. My mother went back to teaching when I was about 12, and my sister and I had the sort of country-style living which was very, very lovely. We did a lot of work in the fields in the summer working not for our own fields necessarily but picking fruits and stringing beans and weeding peppermint, and we supplemented our money by peeling bark off of a tree which is familiarly called in Oregon the chism tree. It's something that is used in laxatives.

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We would peel these trees and dry the bark and sell it to pharmaceuticals. I went away to college at the age of 17, going from a high school graduating class of 48 to Oregon State University in Corvallis, which at that time had about 9,000 or 10,000 students. It was of the two state universities, both land grant schools in Oregon, the one that was considered to be the cow college because it concentrated on things like the various sciences and agriculture and forestry, the things that made Oregon at that point, which was 1958, run. I majored in business. In fact, I majored in something called secretarial science, which no longer exists, but it was one of the three schools in the School of Business. I was very active in college, took part in a lot of activities, was on the student council, was president of my dormitory and of all of the dorms for women, had a lot of other activities, ended up as one of four women honored in our senior year as the outstanding four women of the senior class. I worked hard, I maintained a grade point that was very high, and worked in the summers. I put myself through college with scholarships and by working. I worked up to 40 hours a week and maintained a full school load and did all my activities. In the summers I ran an office for the concessionaire at Crater Lake National Park, which was great fun, and at the end of the summer, which would be somewhere in the second week of September, I would take back to my dorm at Oregon State in Corvallis boxes and boxes and boxes of paper. Then for the next nine months I ran the office from under my dorm bed. That meant a few hours a week at the beginning, and by spring term I was working 40 hours a week as we had reservations come in and orders out for materials and so on. I also worked in various other things in the dormitory itself. I worked for the School of Oceanography doing papers for the head of the department. I graded papers for the Shakespeare professor, also for the Economics section I graded for the finance professor. So I had quite a busy a period in my life there. I graduated in 1962. There was a little bit of money in the pot, because my mother had died when I was in high school, and so both my younger sister and I got a little bit of money from Social Security, from SSI. We had put it in the bank, and I had my \$600 left, and we bought a car with my \$600, a 1958 Chevrolet, used, and she and I bummed around the country for three months. We made it a point to hit every state in the United States except Hawaii. We did drive up the dirt road which was

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the Al-Can Highway to Fairbanks, Alaska, and we covered most of Canada also but not all, but certainly we hit all 50 states in the United States. We started out doing this on a real shoestring. We also had saved a little money on the way, of course, but we started out by allowing ourselves a dollar a day for food. Now this was 1962, but even then a dollar a day for food was not a great deal. We tried to keep our rooms under five dollars a night, a room for the two of us. I suppose that would be in 1997 dollars maybe 30, 25 or 30. We got as far as Flagstaff, Arizona, on this very strict regimen, and in Flagstaff we stayed in a hotel which turned out to be a red light place. Some men tried to break into our room, and we blocked the door with chairs and took turns staying up the rest of the night. When we came out the next morning, somebody had slashed all four of our tires, and that was the end of our one dollar a day for food and five dollars a day for a place to stay. I had always known that I wanted to travel and, in fact, in our little grade school, which had 26 people in the graduating class of the grade school, we had a little cyclostyled bulletin which was our yearbook. In it, it said that I was going to marry a Peruvian diplomat and travel. By the time I got to high school, it said something to the effect that I was going to be a traveling secretary and travel. So I always knew I wanted to travel. I applied for the Foreign Service while I was still in university as a secretary, because at that point it never occurred to me that I could do anything else higher than a secretary.

*Q: I want to go back just a touch. In grade school and later on in high school, and then we'll get to college, what sort of things - did you read much? You were in a pretty limited place.*

HECK: You're only limited by your imagination. I never knew that I was "lower middle class" until a college professor told me this. It seemed to me that being the daughter of a school teacher was a pretty nice thing to be. In the town that I lived in from ages six to 12, there was a one-room library which was open two nights a week, and the entire family, my sister and I and my two parents, always trekked over to the library every Tuesday and every Friday, and we always brought back large numbers of books, and we read voraciously. This was long before other things like television came into our lives.

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I've always read a lot. I always worked in the library. When I was in high school, I was president of the library club. I not only read, I catalogued, I pasted, I did everything there was to do with books. Yes, we certainly always read.

*Q: Any kind of books? I realize pretty much across the board, but did anything grab your fancy particularly, authors, books, types of books?*

HECK: When you live in a town this small, you read what you can get your hands on. I do remember having my mother absolutely livid when she found out at age 12 that I was reading something that she considered to be X-rated, which had been a pretty steamy novel in her college days, that I had found in the grade school library. She grabbed it out of my hand and took it to the PTA, and that caused a good deal of trouble.

*Q: Was it Forever Amber by any chance?*

HECK: No, it wasn't. I've forgotten the name of it. I just remember it had some love scenes that she thought were totally inappropriate for a 12-year-old. Believe me, I probably would have agreed if I were an adult. By the time I got into college, there was very little time for recreational reading, because I was working so hard. But yes, I've always read, and I much prefer history and biography, and for traveling I like murder mysteries and that sort of what I call airport reading. I saved them up and read them later. But it was a pretty eclectic amount of reading. Even in a small town you are blessed with certain good teachers. I had a particular teacher, who was my sixth grade teacher - Mr. Little, John Little was his name - and he was fascinated with what I call ancient European history. He didn't start out with the first reed huts over lakes in Switzerland, but it was almost that. We started out with the Tigris and Euphrates and worked our way through. We only got as far as about the 16th century, I guess, the beginnings of the New World, but he inculcated in me a real love for that sort of thing. He used to make us play Jeopardy-type games a couple of times a week - I loved that.  
*Q: Could you explain what a Jeopardy-type game is?*

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HECK: One where he would throw questions at us and we would have to answer, and it could be on anything that covered whatever period we were studying. I still remember with shame the fact that I didn't answer correctly a question that had to do with - and this was sixth grade, mind you - the towns at the two ends of the Panama Canal and who they were named after. I knew the answer but was afraid to say it and, of course, lost the questions. This was Crist#bal and Colon, and they're named after Christopher Columbus. Well, that has stuck. This is now almost 50 years, 48 years, later and it's still there. I will never forget the names at the two towns at the end of the Canal. But when you have parents who are teachers, and very serious ones at that, we had only serious conversations at dinner. It never was told us this way, but we were expected to listen to the news, we were expected to know what was going on, we were expected to read the newspaper. The Portland Oregonian at that point was not particularly a good newspaper, but at least we were exposed to it. When I was about 14, we finally got television, so there was TV news, and the TV dramas, which were done live in the early '50s, were excellent and certainly spread our wings. I've never had enough time to read, and I think that's one of the things I'm looking forward to in retirement.

*Q: How about in college? Obviously you were busy. You were taking secretarial science. Was the international world intruding at all one way or another on your horizon?*

HECK: I remember a postcard I saw in the out-box when we were in Saigon, Stu, which was written by one of our colleagues, and he had visited - I picked it up because it had a picture of the Memorial Union dome at Oregon State University. On the back of it he had written to his friend, "This is where Joe College went to college," and I think it's probably true. It was a very bucolic setting, and I was at the wrong school, but there I was. My mother had died when I was a senior in high school, and it left me with a semi-invalid grandmother and responsibilities to my father and younger sister. I felt I couldn't go out of the state. I had tinkered earlier with the idea of going to one of the seven sisters...

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Q: *Seven sisters being?*

HECK: Being the seven Ivy League women's universities of the day.

Q: *Smith, Radcliffe, Vassar, that sort.*

HECK: Wellesley, Holy Oak, so on. They were the equivalent up till the time that universities were joined, men and women, of the male Ivy League colleges. At that point they were looking for diversity. It didn't mean quite what it means in 1997, but they were looking for women students from areas outside the typical northeast corridor. So with my grade point and my activities, I was a very desirable candidate for them. But when my mother died in my senior year, I felt I had to stay home. When I did go to university, I did it on a number of scholarships including basically the Elks Lodge. The national Elks Lodge paid for almost half my education because of scholarships that I had won through them. There was a process, and I was number four in the nation on that. The scholarships were contingent upon staying in one's own state, and I did in fact stay in Oregon. I probably should have gone to the University of Oregon, which was the medical school, the law school and the liberal arts. At that point our university, Oregon State University, only had undergraduate studies in things that were considered to be liberal arts. I took secretarial science because in 1958 I thought that with a secretarial background I could always get a job no matter where I was in the world, and I thought it was good job security. From the vantage point of 35 years, that particular little niche in society has disappeared, and it wasn't, but that's why I was there, and I took the absolute minimum in my major, which was the School of Business which meant I also had to have economics, finance, that sort of thing. I took no more than absolutely required, and I had more credits in liberal arts than I did in business, but my degree does say business on it. I took all of the government and history courses I could get my hands on and did pretty well through most of them. The one that I got a B on was history of the Far East. I remember that also because it was shame that I didn't actually get an A on that course, but yes, I did concentrate on things outside the area of business. Oregon State University was and remains quite a diverse campus.

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It draws and even then drew a lot of students from Asia particularly but also from other countries in the rest of the world. My student body president, for instance, when I was on the student council as a senior, was a Palestinian refugee, a Christian Palestinian. There were literally hundreds of Asians, particularly at that point from Thailand because we had an exchange program with Thailand, lots and lots of Indians and Pakistanis to some extent and Taiwanese and so on. Also at that point - and it stopped later - Hawaii only became a state, I guess, in 1959, so Hawaiians had the right of in-state tuition at Oregon State. We had 700 Hawaiians at the university when I went, and they in turn had lots of relatives who were still somewhere else in Asia, and so there was a lot of back and forth between these people's relatives and so on. I did apply for this job at the State Department. At the same time I had intended to apply for the CIA. The dean of men called me in one day. He said, "You can't do that, because they would consider you to be a traitor, so don't apply for the CIA." The reason was that the student council in a momentary show of independence had voted to invite to speak on the campus Gus Hall, who was the General Secretary of the Communist Party in the United States. The administration, of course, in 1961 immediately stomped all over that, but we were all told to stay away from anything that had to do with intelligence work because we had proven that we were disloyal. So I never did apply for the CIA, and I suppose it wouldn't matter today, but I remember being very scared about that.

*Q: Did you, right in the mid-time when you were at Oregon State, get caught up, and your fellow students, in sort of the Kennedy campaign and "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" public service. Did that strike a note?*

HECK: Absolutely. Well, first of all, the election wasn't until 1960 and, of course, at that age - I was 20 in 1960, so I could not vote, because we were still voting only at 21 in those days. Kennedy came to the campus to campaign, and I was just taken with the man. They presented him with a blanket that you're supposed to use at a football game. I'm sure he had 10,000 of them by that time, but he was so eloquent and so grateful, and he gave one of his very famous speeches. Of course, I didn't know that at the time, that it

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was going to be a famous speech, but one decrying the fact that government service was looked down upon and urging us all to be idealistic and to work for our government and so on, and it really touched me. When the elections came, I was probably one of four in my dormitory of 300 who supported Kennedy and not Richard Nixon. But yes, it did hit us, and it continued to hit us. Of course, I was always a political junky. I stayed up and watched every minute of every interminably long convention and followed all of this very carefully and very closely. My college roommate and I talked about it at great length. We were the first women to be allowed to room off campus as seniors in our spring term, and we were considered to be test cases to see whether this would be morally possible. She and I and two other women got an apartment near the campus and spent most of our senior last term talking to each other rather than studying, but, of course, one can coast at that point. She went into the Peace Corps and I went into government, because I thought that I needed the money after having drained virtually every cent that I had in working so hard that I thought I needed to have a paying job, whereas she felt that she could get away with doing some service. Of course, the irony of it all was that after two years when she visited me in my overseas post as she finished her period with the Peace Corps in Malaysia, she was the one with money in her pocket and I, of course, had gone through every cent, because at that point the Peace Corps was giving a mustering-out allowance of some sort which allowed her to travel around the world on her way home and spend four or five months doing it, while I was stuck with my nose to the grindstone working for Uncle Sam. But yes, of course, it made a great difference to us at that point. We were young and we were idealistic.

*Q: How did you hear about the Foreign Service?*

HECK: I guess I always knew about it. I mean it was part of these things that... I knew I was going to apply for it when I got old enough. Certainly by the time I was 12 or so, I knew about it.

*Q: Was this where the Peruvian diplomat came in?*



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HECK: I suspect so. That was my classmates' idea of what it was that I meant that I was going to do, but I have known as long as I can remember and the origins of it are lost somewhere in the sands or the fogs of time. I just don't know. But yes, definitely since adolescence.

*Q: What was the process of getting a job with the State Department?*

HECK: Well, at that point they were interviewing at my university for secretarial staff and I applied, and it was just a matter of waiting for them. So I filled out the forms and talked to the interviewer in the spring of 1962, graduated at the end of May, had this long trip in the summer, came back to Oregon in the fall just looking for something that would while away the months until I was sure I would be called. You have to understand that secretarial graduates in secretarial science were a desirable commodity for the State Department at that time, and anybody who could walk and graduate from this university's program got a job with the State Department if they in fact wanted them, and several others did. So I had about four months, I thought, to kill, and in the interim I applied for a stenographic position with one of the major banks in the state, thinking that it was the sort of job that I could just do eight to five and I didn't have to worry about telling them what I was going to do later or why; I could just earn a paycheck for a few months while I was waiting. So I applied and was hired by U.S. National Bank, which was one of the two big banks in the state of Oregon at that time. The problem was that after they took me on board - and I had applied for this stenographic job which was advertised in the paper - they looked at my background, which was probably too academic for what they expected to get for this, and they assigned me instead to be a trainer to teach people how to be tellers, so I spent four months training people and administering tests and escorting tours around the bank explaining how banking worked. It was all terribly funny, because I was sort of one step ahead of the audience, but I did that for four months, and I finally got the call from the State Department in late January of 1963 to come to Washington DC. I quit the second week of February, got on a plane and flew from Portland, Oregon, to Washington

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on February 12 or February 11. My date of entry was February 12, 1963. Somebody today couldn't imagine how exciting that was, to come to Washington coming from out of this small town background, having this idealistic sort of love, patriotism, very simplistic in the way I would look at it today, I suppose. I'm a lot more cynical, probably a lot more sophisticated, but I was very excited. I had hardly ever been on a plane. I had had one flight home. I had given myself my senior year - leaving Crater Lake National Park, I had gone down to the flatlands in Medford and flown up to Portland. So I had been on an airplane once, but I was very green. I got on this plane and flew to Baltimore, what was then called Friendship Airport, flew in on a dark, cold, gray winter full of snow - we didn't have much snow where I grew up - and drove into Washington in a bus, took the bus into Washington. In those days the State Department was putting its women, new hires, into something called the Meridian Hill Hotel for Women. Driving to this hotel at the top of 16th Street by Meridian Park, it was so exciting looking at those buildings with the lights on them and seeing the Capitol - I could see the Capitol dome if I really craned my neck from this window in my little cubbyhole there - and passing the Washington Monument and the Jefferson Memorial all lit up. Somebody from the East Coast who had seen these things growing up wouldn't understand how impressive that was. We got up to the Meridian Hill Hotel for Women, and this little sort of mini-van type thing pulled in front under a portico, and I got out with my suitcases. It was probably only 7:30 or so, but it seemed quite late at night. The entrance was a glass door with two glass panels on either side, and as I got out of this machine with my suitcase all wet behind the ears, some men were being thrown out of the building. I can't remember now, but I think it was run pretty much like our dorms were run. There was a house mother, and the men could only stay in the lobby, and you had to sign in and sign out; it was all very much cloistered. Anyway, as I came out this young man was being thrown out, and there were a couple of them, and one of them ran through or was pushed through - I don't know - the glass panel on the side of the door. To make it even worse, he was an African American, and I had grown up in a place where there were no African Americans. I was scared to death. Here I was in the big city and all by myself for the first time in my life, and they were fighting in the lobby of my hotel.

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That really made a big impression on me. I never wrote home about that one, of course. Anyway, the ground was covered with snow. I went down to the State Department the next day, and I filled in all the papers and I did whatever it was they made us do. I don't remember very much about it. I think they gave us a couple of courses. Then I was pretty much on my own. This was by then the beginning of March.

*Q: When you came in or even when you were recruited, was anybody asking whether you would like to go?*

HECK: Not at that point, no. Nobody asked me anything at that point. I was assigned to a job in the State Department which was supposed to teach me how to do State Department things, the formats and just the way the building ran. I was assigned to an office in what was then the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs - and I gather it's going to be coming back to us from USIA now. But it was a specific office that dealt with UNESCO and even more specifically with American contributions to raising the temples of Abu Simbel in Egypt before the Aswan Dam was built. So for the next four months or so, my whole life was involved with a temple I had never even heard of before but of which I have become very fond. I've never seen it, but someday I will. And that is: How does one cut Abu Simbell off of a rock cliff, raise it several hundred feet so that the water coming in from the dam won't destroy it? And they were able to do this. It was very difficult because the work had to be so precise. The Egyptians had built it so that the sun struck the altar on the spring solstice. The altar was in the very back of this long, narrow area of columns, a long, narrow temple, so just moving it, knowing how to move it, so that you got the sun on the proper spot at the proper time was very, very technical, and it was able to be done. I didn't realize at the time how difficult it was to get American money for this sort of thing, but it was not as difficult as it would become later.

*Q: Did you pick up any emanations concerning sort of tense relations between Egypt and the United States in those days?*

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HECK: Well, in those days, of course, we were not friends exactly. They were an ally or at least had much more close ties with the then Soviet Union. No, I was at that point just involved with learning how to live in Washington and learning how to deal with the State Department. We were not told to room with other people, but we were encouraged to, and I roomed with two other women in a one-bedroom apartment across the street from the State Department in a building that was then called the Sherry Towers and which is today a hotel on 23rd and E Streets. One of the girls - and we were all girls at that point, not women - was a Latvian refugee whose family had walked from Riga into Germany to be ahead of the Russians. She was in a DP camp, a displaced persons camp, for a long period of time and came to the United States when she was around 12. She came from Hartford, Connecticut. The other was a Mexican American woman from Laredo, Texas, whose native language was most definitely Spanish and who was very religious. It was an interesting experience, because I was able to meet for the first time people completely different from me. Believe me, Oregon State, even with its foreign students, was still very much a part of my background. Somewhere after about three months we were hauled in and asked to tell the system where we wanted to be assigned. In those days, of course, we couldn't choose from a list of vacancies; we were just assigned. When I had my interview with this woman from Personnel, two things stuck in my memory. One was that she presumed - not true, but she presumed - that I was Jewish, and she told me that I could not go to the Middle East. It never occurred to me in those days to question this.

*Q: Your maiden name was Sherman?*

HECK: My maiden name was Sherman, which is, of course, a German-sounding name, and I guess she thought it was German Jewish. I should have been terribly offended, and I sat there and listened to this and didn't say a word. In fact, my maiden name probably isn't Sherman, but my grandfather, my paternal grandfather, who was a Pennsylvania Dutch German, was obviously from the Munich area and was Roman Catholic. He left home in

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a great hurry sometime around the turn of the century, left southern Pennsylvania and went to Oregon, and in the process he changed his name. He chose Sherman because he liked William Tecumseh Sherman, General William Tecumseh Sherman. What it was he did in Pennsylvania we never did find out, whether he had robbed a bank, killed a man, impregnated a woman, got mad at his father, it was lost, we don't know. So we know that the name Sherman was not what he had started out with. But in any case, going back to the State Department, I should have said something at that point and I just didn't. The idea that they would question me, that they would ask what my religion was, that they would upon that decide where I was going to be assigned, I think is terrible, and it bothers me right now. But that's the way it was, so I was told I couldn't go to the Middle East. Then she said, "Where would you like to go?" and I said, "Well, I've just gotten out of a school in a very coolish, moderate climate, and I didn't save any money because I was working my way through and so I don't have any summer clothes, so I'd like to go to a place where I could use all these wools that I have from Oregon State University." So she said, "Fine," and the next thing I knew I was going to Bombay, India. So there went the wools to the way of all moths, and off I went to Bombay. I was assigned perhaps in July, and I arrived there around Labor Day. In the meantime I remember lying on this bed in what was an efficiency apartment. By that time the girl from Laredo had decided she didn't want to go overseas when she found out they would not send her to a Spanish-speaking country or at least they would not send her to either Mexico or Spain because she had relatives in both places. So she quit and went home, and the two of us left, had to give up our one-bedroom apartment and move into an efficiency. So I remember lying there during the summer on this bed in the efficiency reading the book about Bombay and finding out that I was going to be only several blocks from what were called the Towers of Silence, towers looking somewhat like the Tower of Babel upon which bodies are placed, of Parsis, a particular religion, after they die and the vultures eat them. I lay there just absolutely petrified at the thought of these bones falling out of the sky from the mouths of vultures. After a few years in India, that seemed rather minor, but anyway it was very important then. I left Washington in late August, stopped in Oregon to say goodbye to my father and

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to my sister, and left. My route was, at least for me, very exciting, traveling by myself in the late summer of 1963. We flew from Portland and had to reload and refuel again in Sea-Tac Airport, which is the airport for Seattle/Tacoma - that's only 120 miles up the road or something - and then on to Anchorage, Alaska, and from Anchorage to Tokyo. I was to overnight in Tokyo. We got about an hour out of Tokyo and something went wrong with the plane. It was a full-moon night, and they announced that we were going to turn back to Anchorage, but before we could turn back, they had to dump all the fuel. So we dumped all the fuel over this ocean upon which the moon shimmered, and we turned around and landed again at Anchorage. They made us stay on the plane, and after an hour or two they took off. Today this would not bother me at all, but at that point I was scared to death and I basically stayed awake the entire way to Tokyo, which was a very long way, sort of willing the plane to stay in the sky so that we would get to the next stop. From Tokyo I went to Hong Kong for a day. From Hong Kong I was going to visit my roommate in Malaysia. It was Hong Kong to Singapore, overnight again in Singapore, and then Singapore to Kuala Lumpur.

*Q: While you were overnighing, this meant you went into town.*

HECK: Oh, yes, I went into town.

*Q: So what was your impression of places like Japan?*

HECK: Oh, my goodness, you should have seen me. My eyes were so big, I could hardly believe it. Here I am coming out of Oregon, and it was actually a very modern city, but it looked very exotic to me at that point as did Hong Kong, and particularly Singapore, which was all British colonial bungalows and big flowering trees. I stayed in a hotel called the Cockpit, which was a very British hotel where people were drinking things with rum and gin in them in the lobby and that sort of thing. It got really scary at that point because I had trouble traveling across the United States by myself and here I was in Singapore. I went to the airport the next morning to get on the plane for Kuala Lumpur, and the

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entire plane had been taken by the government because this was the celebration of the formation of Malaysia, the combination of Malaya and Singapore and the various British colonies which had been in Borneo. The plane was going to be utilized for a group of tribal chieftains coming in from one of the Borneo elements of this amalgamation. So I got an extra day in Singapore out of the deal, but I was very worried about meeting my friend and how I was going to keep on schedule. I reached Kuala Lumpur a day late, was met by my college roommate, who was posted in a town called Kuala Selangor, which was only a couple of hours out of Kayel. We stayed in her very lovely, clean apartment. She was a schoolteacher teaching English in this town of perhaps 40,000 people. My remembrance of it, aside from the fact that the floors were cool and you took your shoes off at the entrance, was that the bathroom had what is called a Singapore jar.

*Q: Is this what's known as a Turkish bomb site or the equivalent there?*

HECK: No, this was an Ali Baba's den sort of bottle which came to my chest and was shaped like an urn, and it was full of water. This was where you stored the water for bathing, and it was lovely. The other thing, we'd march down the road and we'd buy food off of the street vendors and wrap it in banana leaves and take it home, and it was absolutely delicious. We went that night to a dinner across the river. We had to get into this little launch. The British were still there in large numbers even though the country was independent and they were having the formation of Malaysia itself. We were going to a rubber plantation, and we were met at the pier on this rainy night by a British Colonel Blimp type wearing white shorts and a white shirt and a big black umbrella. He had a big white mustache, and he said, "Welcome to the Rubana, Ladies," the Rubana being the name of this plantation. It was full of young British males. They had to be single. They were out there to run the plantation, and the first part of their time was they had to learn Tamil because all the workers were Indian Tamils brought in from south India. It was a dream, to be 22 years old or 23 years old and surrounded by young British bachelors and being for the first time in your life in Somerset Maugham country. It was great.

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*Q: Was the insurrection on at that point?*

HECK: Yes, there was some trouble, but it was not on this coastal area. It was inland in the jungle area, so I never saw any of that. I just saw how nice it was to live in this lovely area surrounded by British males and good food. So I spent four or five days there and then flew on from Kuala Lumpur to Bombay, India. When we arrived in Bombay on a hot, muggy evening in early September, some man from Immigration got on the plane with an aerosol insect bomb, and he walked up and down the aisles spraying us all with 2-4-D or some product of that sort. The music on the Muzak or whatever it was called in those days on this 7 - whatever the plane was, it was not a 707 but it was of that ilk - was playing "Wonderful, Wonderful Copenhagen" as this man sprayed us with insect repellent. We got off the plane, and there I was in Bombay.

*Q: I'd like to get this at the beginning of tour. You were in Bombay from when to when?*

HECK: I was in Bombay from September of 1963 until early July or late June of 1967, so almost four years, three years and nine months.

*Q: Had you heard anything sort of by the State Department grapevine or something, or did you have a grapevine about either the people or the post of Bombay before you went out?*

HECK: Well, we had the post report. First of all, I had this awful image of the Towers of Silence and the bones. We had the post report, which told us how many black ties to bring and how many long evening dresses to bring and other information of minor importance. I was so new, I didn't have the money to buy anything anyway, so I had to go with what I had and pick it up later. Very little information. In today's world we do have a lot of information. We have a briefing center that provides all sorts of things - no, not in those days.



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*Q: I was wondering whether you had run into anybody who had been there and said, "Oh, that's an awful post" or "You don't want to deal with Messrs. So and So."*

HECK: I remember a man I worked with who told me to drink Bombay gin, which was a brand name in those days and perhaps still is. I was shocked by that in those days. But no, very little about the post. I knew I was going to be the secretary to the consul general, and I knew that this was quite an honor because it was about four grades over what my grade was at the time. But other than that, no, I had no advance notice and I hadn't heard from anyone and I didn't have any sort of connection, although all that was there when I got there. Somebody did meet me, and somebody had food in the house. There was no information given to me at the beginning.

*Q: Looking back on it, how competent were you as a secretary? You had taken secretarial science, but there are certain things. Stenography was the big thing in those days.*

HECK: Well, I took shorthand at about 140, and I typed at between 92 and 98 depending on the typing machine. I was good.

*Q: That's good.*

HECK: I was fast, and I obviously had a degree and I had taken a lot of other courses, and I'm sure that's why they assigned me to this job. Probably the real reason was they probably had trouble finding somebody to take it, which is always the thing in the State Department. But to get a stretch of three grades is unusual. So I suppose they sort of looked at all the cards together and picked out mine because I had the education. I can't think of any other reason for it. I had never asked specifically for India or for that part of the world at that point. Later I became very interested in it, but, no, I was very, very green.

*Q: Could you describe the post and some of the people in the post first and working conditions.*

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HECK: The consul general or the consulate general is located on the sea, on the Indian Ocean, at something called Wonkaneer House. The Maharajah of Wonkaneer was the head of a very small state in Saurashtra in southern Gujarat. This was his town palace. I never met the man or any of his relatives, but I gather that he must have been quite a playboy. The building itself was 1920s', probably British colonial architecture with a beautiful vista of the sea. By the time I got there, the consulate general itself was located on the ground floor in what amounted to an L-shaped building with a side building for administration, and the upper floor of what was a two-story building was the home of the consul general. That particular home - I remember his wife telling me, my first consul general there, and showing me, as a matter of fact, had beautiful, cloudy pink mirrors, and these mirrors had covered the ceilings of all the bedrooms, which is why I say that I assume that this is where the Maharajah of Wonkaneer came to play, but I don't know anything particular about it. We got it apparently at about the time of independence around 1947. We had been located in the city for years and years, as we had been in all of the major cities of India. Our consulates in India go back to the late 18th and early 19th centuries in most cases. But the consulate at that point had a rather large staff - much larger than it does today, I suspect - but much differently apportioned than we have today. In the '60s visa law was such that Indians only were allowed a hundred people a year or a hundred families - I'm not sure.

*Q: A little earlier, I was the vice consul in Dhahran and I used to meet Indians, and they'd ask where they were on the list as far as waiting- (end of tape)*

HECK: It meant that we had very little consular work of that sort. We didn't issue Visas. Our consular operation for a quarter of India had one American officer. It was a full-service consulate. By that I mean we had somebody from the Commerce Department, we had a CIA sub-unit, we had a rather large administrative section because we did bring a lot of things in for New Delhi as well as for Bombay. The hierarchy was a consul general, his deputy principal officer, and perhaps 26 other Americans. I was the senior

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of four secretaries of whom two belonged to State and two to the CIA. We had two communicators. Our major interests were twofold. One was business. We had a big American business presence in Bombay in those days including the major oil companies. Secondly, to report on the political stabilization and political situation in the country. Being a political officer in the mid-'60s, early in the mid-'60s, meant covering every single district race in a national election. Forty years later we don't really care about that at all and pay very little attention to internal politics. It's all done more or less in one place out of New Delhi. But in those days we had major attention paid to, as I said, every race in our three states, which were and are Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh in India. Life was completely different than it is in the Foreign Service today. We had a few apartments in very nice buildings for our senior officers under the rank of the consul general, and they all tended to look out on the ocean, beautiful. Those of us who were single, including all the single officers, lived in something called Washington House, which is still there. It sits at the top of Kambala Hill. From my balcony on the top of three stories, in those days I could see the ocean and watch the sunset. Today, of course, there are high-rises everywhere and all you see are canyons of traffic and other buildings, but my view in those days was of palm trees with the ocean behind it and the sun setting into the Indian Ocean. It was very lovely. Our apartments were all one-bedroom apartments in this building full of singles. Each apartment was a living room/dining room combination that ran the width of the building which was not air conditioned and which was open all year long to the elements. There was a balcony on one end, and you did have windows to close on the other so that you could close it off if the rain were pouring in, but basically, because of the heat and humidity, you kept everything open. You were allowed one air conditioner for your bedroom, so the bedroom was air conditioned. I still own books, including my Shakespeare text from college, which, when I open them, smell of mildew, because after they sit in bookcases in that sort of thing for almost four years, you never get the smell of mildew out of them, nor do you get the little holes left by the silverfish or all the other things. But anyway, it was fun. Life was much different than it is now. We had no access to commissary. The commissary was in New Delhi, and Bombay was not allowed to use

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it. We could use it when we went up there. We could go into it and buy things and carry them back with us if we could get them on the train or on the airplane, but we didn't order. So what we did do as a group was to order some things from abroad. We would put in joint orders to Denmark, Osterman, Peterson and Peter Justisson. You got things by the case lot, and we usually concentrated on paper products and things like alcohol for entertaining and special foods for special occasions, Christmas-type things and so on. You couldn't bring anything in that might melt, things like chocolate or candles, because they would be ruined before they even arrived. But things that mattered particularly were paper. You could even buy liquor in Bombay in those days as a foreigner at the ship's chandler's downtown, but you couldn't get decent paper of any sort including toilet paper, which was a commodity held in great esteem. And we ordered meat from Kenya, which would come in by the PNO liners from Mombasa through The Seychelles to Bombay. So we would get food that way. The Indian government at that period did not allow anyone except the consul general to have an automobile, so we all relied on taxis and local transport. I took the bus a lot. The buses, of course, were the same ones that are there 35 years later, so they were in much better shape in 1963 than they are in 1997. But we managed all right. I do remember sitting around on the balcony one evening having drinks and watching the sunset with other singles from the building, and this included people from USIA as well as from State and the CIA, and we fantasized about food and we would talk for hours about a hamburger and what it would be like to have lettuce. We never saw lettuce for four years. Chocolate was also a big commodity to dream about, and you could discuss an ice cream soda with chocolate on it as if it were something to kill for. But I was young, and it seemed like a great life in those days. I wouldn't perhaps like it so much these days.

*Q: What about the social life for a young woman in a non-European society?*

HECK: It was marvelous. It was really marvelous. First of all, Bombay was and still is the New York of the country. It's much more sophisticated than New Delhi, for instance, which is the capital. It had the movie industry, it had the finance industry, and still does in both instances. It had what amounted to be the beginning of an advertising industry. It was a

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sophisticated city. It even had a few Indian women - very few, but a few, and they were my friends - who were working women. They were almost nonexistent. I should qualify that. The Christian community and the Anglo-Indian community allowed their women to work, and those were the women who were the office staffs of most buildings, but I'm thinking now about what I would call professional women, young women who were in advertising, for instance, who were from Hindu or Muslim families. There were even a few of those, and that's what was so unusual. But as to the social life, I remember out of the four years I was there I kept a calendar, a diary, for two of those years, and in one year I had five nights at home and in one year I had eight nights at home, and the other nights I was out every single night. There were dinners and parties and dances. We did things as a group usually. It was not necessarily a personal relationship. But there was a market to being young and a single woman in a society that needed extra women at dinner tables and things like that. So I went to diplomatic do's, consular do's. I spent a lot of time with the Indian Navy. I got involved with an Indian officer, and then it became quite serious, but even as somebody without a specific male in tow, there were parties to go to on the carrier. The *Becraunt* was the only Indian aircraft carrier at that point, and they would hold their New Year's Eve party on the flight deck and there would be dancing and champagne, and it was all great fun. Those days have changed too. In those days there was that and there were opportunities for parties on American ships. India was having a great shortage of food in those days, and our aid program in those days was sending in lots and lots, ships and ships, particularly of grain under PL480. I've forgotten whether we called it USAID in those days or not.

*Q: I'm not sure it moved, but USAID had several permutations. This was, of course, a huge program.*

HECK: Yes, it was, and the ships came into Bombay because it has the best harbor in India. These big carriers would come in loaded to the gills with grain, and they couldn't dock. They had to be offloaded in midstream, and we would go out on the launches and climb up the ladder. Aside from parties, what I really remember here - we spent so much

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time talking about food - we would ask them to invite us for breakfast, because they would have things like blueberry pancakes. We could make pancakes, but there were no blueberries to be had anywhere. They would have all sorts of goodies. They would give us Western ice cream at breakfast, just things we hadn't seen for a while. We would just pig out on the food, and then they would let us shop in their little whatever they called it - it was not a commissary, but their little ships' stores where they would have things like razor blades for the crew, but it was stuff that we couldn't get because India was in a period in those days of self reliance and everything that was available legally tended to be made in India, and the quality in 1963 was not anywhere near what we were used to, whether it was cloth to make clothes or sunglasses or razor blades. So we would stock up on things out there. Also, I was very lucky because my consul general, Milton Rewinkel, and his wife, Peppa Rewinkel, were very generous to me, and they took me in like a daughter. I was on virtually all of their party lists, so I got to meet all sorts of interesting people whom I would not have met if I just were left to myself. So I had on one side a very sort of glamorous - what seemed to me to be glamorous - life and on the other side perhaps not so glamorous. First thing I learned was that a single woman, at this point 23, in India was viewed by most Indian males certainly and by families in general as having something wrong. You must be from a very poor family, because why would your father let you travel halfway around the world to work, why isn't he taking care of you, why aren't you married; and so I found out that a few introductions that I had from people in the United States turned out to be situations in which I didn't feel very comfortable. The men would come to meet me, and I knew they were married, and it would only be them and they would want to take me to dinner. Now I think that was probably meant as friendship as much as anything. Then, coming from my background which was terribly small-town and Protestant moral, I found this very uncomfortable. So that was a problem. Perhaps my best Indian girlfriend, her father started to make obscene telephone calls to me at night, and I recognized his voice. I found situations like that which were difficult for me to handle. Much later in my life, a very wise friend of mine, who has also spent a good deal of his career in south Asia, said to me, "Well, you know, Ernie, then you were a young woman and now you're something

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else, because when Western women reach a certain age, they become sort of a third sex in that part of the world, and you're safe now. Nobody's bothering you in 1983 in India because you're old, but in 1963 you weren't, and that's the difference." I think he may have had a point. I'm not sure. India has changed a great deal in 35 years, but also there is that aspect. Western women alone without male protection in the early '60s were considered to be wanton and sort of fair game for a lot of people, and one had to learn how to deal with it.

*Q: Was there concern sort of from the security angle? I'm thinking of compromise by a single American woman working for the consul general being compromised by some male sneaking up on you and having an affair and getting all your secrets, that sort of thing, in the Indian context.*

HECK: Oh, I suppose it's possible. At the time, I didn't notice it.

*Q: I mean, were you being warned about this?*

HECK: No, I was not. On the other hand, I'm sure if I had gone over a certain line, somebody might have warned me. Also, of course, there are very few secrets to sell in the consulate general as opposed to an embassy. We dealt with, as I said before, commercial matters and just some local political reporting and so on. Of course, I had not mentioned before the major role that USIA played there, the public information angle of presenting our ideas, American ideas and American films and so on, was a very big part of our life.

*Q: This period of '63 to '67 is a very interesting one in America. In the first place, within two months President Kennedy was assassinated. Did that have any impact in Bombay or not?*

HECK: President Kennedy's death had a tremendous impact. I suspect it had that all over the world, most certainly in India and most certainly in west India. I for the next three years was the deputed person to go out and meet Indians of all types and levels of society and education, who came in bearing the most extraordinary range of gifts for Mrs. Kennedy



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usually, sometimes for the United States in general. These were almost always things that were handmade, and they were about President Kennedy or pictures of President Kennedy, articles about President Kennedy, poems to Mrs. Kennedy or to the children. I have seen his face woven into cloth, painted on things, wood-crafted, just an extraordinary range from the sublime to the ridiculous, but all very heartfelt. We had a memorial service for him in the Anglican cathedral in town. The mob was tremendous. The church was absolutely packed, and there were people outside, and everyone wearing white. White in India is the color of mourning. People stopped you on the street to say how sorry they were. No, the outpouring from India was absolutely tremendous. President Kennedy grabbed the imagination of the world, certainly of the Asian world in a way that perhaps no one else had done, as far as I know, up till that time. I only remember one sort of negative note, and here again it was from some of my British friends, and I think it certainly is not a sign of being British; it's a sign of being young and selfish. By the time I heard it happened on what for me was a Friday night, Saturday morning, I was lying in bed. It was two o'clock in the morning, and I was reading *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*.

Q: *Oscar Wilde*.

HECK: And somebody knocked on the door, and I went to the door. I guess I was not surprised. Nothing seemed to surprise me in those days. It would if someone knocked on my door today. It was one of the communications, one of what we call code clerks. It was one of the guys who was a communicator. He stopped by. He said he had seen my light on, and he came in to tell me that President Kennedy had been killed. I put the book down, and to this day I've never finished *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, and I don't even want to. To me it was like closing a door. We all went into the office the next morning, and we pulled out the FAMS, the Foreign Affairs Manuals, to find out what we were supposed to do in the case of the death of a President. Certainly I didn't know, and my boss didn't know either, but there is in the book somewhere a whole section on what you do. One of the things that you do is send out black-bordered announcements. Normally one has more time. One knows if somebody is ill. It takes time. We didn't expect a young vibrant man to



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be shot at the age of whatever, 40-something. So we had none of this stuff on hand, and there was nowhere in town to buy any of it, and so we sat around with what amounted to black magic markers, the equivalent in 1963, and we made by hand black-bordered paper to send these notices out, and we sent them out. After we had taken care of all the normal things, finding a book, getting the book open, putting up the prep.

*Q: You're talking about a book in which people sign, a condolence book?*

HECK: A condolence book, I'm sorry - and doing all of the things that one does in the death of an official. I began to take care of my boss's social calendar to call people, to explain why things were being canceled or why he could not come; and when it was all over, I did my own. Actually we did our own, because the other secretary and I did this very much as a team. In any case, we were going to have a party, and we had to cancel the party at very short notice. Saturday night was the party, and this was Saturday morning, and so we started calling around, and everyone was very gracious except one of our young British bachelor friends who worked for the P&O steamship line who was very miffed that we would dare to cancel this party that they were looking forward to just because of this silly thing about our President being killed. Didn't we understand that they wanted the party? But that was one instance, and no one else. We were joined by the love of many, many thousands of people in Bombay over the death of President Kennedy. It was a real turning point for all of us.

*Q: Were you feeling any reflections from the fact that, I guess it was in 1962, there had been this confrontation with China up in the Himalayas and that the United States had given some support there? Did that ring at all within Bombay?*

HECK: Yes, it did. It rang all over. Well, it certainly rang to some extent in Bombay and most definitely among the more sophisticated, more educated people who followed what was happening in the world. I suspect it resonated all over India. India had not expected to be attacked by China in October of '62. The government certainly should have seen it

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coming. The army was terribly ill prepared, and perhaps the powers that be in New Delhi were aware of it, but certainly the people weren't. When this happened, the issue at hand had to do with disputed borders which had been drawn on the maps both on the northwest and the northeastern borders between India and China, had been drawn on the maps by the British. Of course, they just took a pen and drew a line down a map. It didn't matter when they were ruling the earth, but after they left, it did matter. The Chinese attacked simultaneously in both the northeastern and the northwest areas. In the northwestern area the argument had to do, of course, over disputed borders, but the Chinese really needed the northwestern area that they wanted from India because they were building a road or had built a road and it cut across the great thumb of what belonged to India. The northeastern border may or may not have been a diversionary tactic, but in any case they did attack at both places. The people in India were absolutely shocked. The people hadn't expected it. There had been some rhetoric, but there's always rhetoric and who pays any attention, that sort of thing. All over India people were collecting gold. Women were throwing in their bracelets and this sort of thing to pay for it. The bottom line is that the Indians got their nose really bloody. In the process the United States offered help to Pundit Nehru, the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and we did in fact send some military and other kinds of assistance, about which I know very little, to the Indian government. India knew about this and India was grateful, Indians themselves were grateful. So in 1962-63 when we had helped against their enemy, the Chinese, and were providing food to help them face the problems that they had agriculturally, things were good. The India-U.S. relationship is very closely tied to the Pakistan-U.S. relationship and the Pakistan-India relationship, which brings us to 1965 when there was fighting between India and Pakistan both in May and in September of that year. At that point, I guess, one could say, although, believe me, I was no political officer at that time and I was sitting a long way away, but I would say that with that and our ties with Pakistan, our star went on the descendant for a great period of time with India. But the relationship is a triangular for us always with India, and I'll talk about that at some other point. So in 1963 things were fine. We were very

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much a friend. India was still licking its wounds from what it had learned in fighting with the Chinese on the Malayan line in the northwest and in the northeast, and we were a friend.

*Q: Did you pick up, at the dinner parties working for the consul general at the diplomatic consular parties and all and business class, any feel for sort of the view of Nehru and the United States, his view toward the United States and what we considered Nehru to be?*

HECK: By the time I reached Bombay in September of '63, the favorite party game in India was After Nehru, Who? Nehru was by then an old, tired, sick man. The war with China had probably been the final straw that changed him. He did not die until May of 1965, but it was a twilight period for him. It was something of a death watch about him by the foreign press, the local press, less noticeably and less openly but definitely there. A book was written after Nehru, who was, as I said, the subject of a great deal of conversation. So, no, it didn't cross my radar screen at that point. Yes, he was still the Prime Minister, but he was increasingly tired and his daughter, Indira Gandhi, was in effect protecting him from the outside world. Other members of the Congress Party, his party, were jockeying for position. It was a time of transition. So at that point his life was behind him.

*Q: Did you get any feel from what you were picking up about India and the USSR, the Soviet Union?*

HECK: In Bombay in those days the Soviet had a much larger consulate than we did, but I suspect that they were more appreciated in New Delhi, where they represented the diplomatic force of their nation, than they were down in Bombay, which was, and I think still is, a rather happy, gay, ebullient society, and the Soviet diplomats of those days were not in that category. They in many cases didn't have a lot of English. They did have a lot, I must admit, of regional tongues. They were very good at that, but they were very serious and very dour, as one expects from that period of time. So their influence locally had to do with what they had purchased, and I think that's probably true of most of India until the fall of the Soviet Union in the late '80s, beginning of '90. The Soviet Union, until they

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could no longer afford it, owned a good deal of the press in India. I mean by that that they supported, surreptitiously but supported, a wide variety of leftist press all over the country. They put a lot of money in Bombay into what I would call a tabloid called Blitz, which was read all over the country. It always had spicy pictures, ala the British tabloids - well, not very spicy by our standards, but by Indian standards pretty spicy - lots of interesting gossip, but always with a really vitriolic twist to anything that had to do with politics. The support was for the leftists in the government, lip service at least and probably more to the Congress Party, and we were enemy number one - well, for the foreigners, as the rightist political types in India were the enemy number one for them internally. At that point in Bombay the rightist parties in the '60s won the Shiv Sena, which is a state party in Maharashtra built around the concept of supporting Maratha people against outsiders from other parts of India, particularly south Indians then who were taking over jobs in the city. That was one of their bugaboos that got a lot of this, and the Swatantra Party, which is more into other things now. I suppose you could say it's the grandfather of perhaps even the BJP or the Bharatiya Janata Party, which is the major opposition in India in the late '90s. But we were definitely the foreign enemy number one. We outranked the British on this, because we were more powerful.

*Q: Was there any reflection - you were young and single and going out - in society were you picking up, was there a leftist inclination in the academic institutions, or were the people you were seeing more involved in commerce?*

HECK: If there was then, I did not see it, no. The leftist inclination in Bombay in the '60s would have been - it was a class thing, I would have said. There were leftist trade unions. There was a major trade union, and still is - I believe it to be still existent today - that at that point in time was getting a lot of money from the Soviet Union, and it was their trade union, as it were. Trade unions had a major role, still do, in India. A lot of what happened in India in the mid-'60s really came from the London school of economics in London of the mid-'30s. Part of the reason is because Nehru was impressed by this, but it came at the country from other directions as well. So there was a leftist, socialistic sort of bent

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there aside from what the Soviets might or might not be doing. Of course, in this period the Chinese had been, as it were, rolled up. There was a Chinese community locally in India, and there still is, people who came some time ago as well as reasonably recently, so there were so-called Chinatowns in the major cities, but the Chinese government had been closed with the war, so there was no competition there. We did have quite a strain of various kinds of Arab pressures in Bombay in those days. The Kuwait consulate was very important. The Emir of Kuwait came every year. But there were also honorary consulates or regular consulates representing a number of the countries in the Middle East in those days, and there was a good deal of trade back and forth including, I might add, smuggling. I remember going out at one point to a place called Madh Island. It's not spelled M U D; it's M A D H. But anyway, we were going out to spend some time with a Bohemian Australian artist and his wife who had a cottage on the other side of the island. We took the ferry across to the island. We were met by a bullock cart. We rode in this bullock cart for what seemed like forever - because a bullock cart is not a very comfortable place to be - to the other side of the island, and there we were in this very, very lovely sort of get-away place with a cottage. The cottage was made out of mud and was actually covered with cow dung as a paste that makes the walls smooth. The roof was made of palm fronds and was full of all sorts of things that went bump in the night, and it had a mud floor. We slept outside. We just ate inside of this place where we had a little sort of a campfire built, and Indian wooden stove - I don't know how to explain it. But in any case, we stayed in this what seemed to us to be paradise-lost sort of atmosphere until we walked down to the village. There we were in this country where nobody could import anything, and all of these men were wearing the cloth of choice that year which was Terylene, a shiny synthetic something-or-other with shiny synthetic shirts - terribly uncomfortable in the climate, but that was modern - and they were all smugglers. They had fancy radios, and they had all sorts of electric equipment that we didn't see in the city, because they were smuggling into Oman basically, I think.

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*Q: And Trucial states too, because I saw the other end of it again when I was in Dhahran. Gold used to go in and all sorts of stuff. This was part of that trade that had been going on before the United States was even dreamed of.*

HECK: Absolutely. So there was that sort of smuggling, but there was more legitimate support from the various Arab countries. That remains till this day. One has to remember when dealing with India that the second largest Muslim country in the world is India. So other countries which are Islamic have an interest.

*Q: Indonesia is number one?*

HECK: And India is number two.

*Q: You were talking about economic matters, the smuggling and the economy and all. Were you picking up anything, gnashing of teeth or something, at the consulate general because of the Indian controls over attempts of Americans to develop commercial enterprises and that sort of thing?*

HECK: Well, India did not open its doors commercially in reality until about 1991. So between Indian independence in '47 and 1991, it was a very controlled economy. Yes, it was a very complicated thing to be an American businessman. We didn't really have American small business in those days in that part of India at least. The major firms, I suspect, had all been there before the British left, although I do not know that for a fact. They were mainly the oil companies. Esso was there. Was it called Esso in those days? It may have been called Standard Oil. I don't remember what it was in '63, but what is now Exxon was there, and there were three or four others which were big, and the Bank of America and CitiBank were both there. There again, they were later closed out during Mrs. Gandhi's reign in the '70s, but while I was there, they were big players. And there was a rather large Chamber of Commerce, but it basically represented that sort of firm. There

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wasn't anything else. So the opportunity for American businesses to come in really didn't pertain at that point.

*Q: Well, from what you could see, did we tell American business no point in trying, because part of our business is what is called trade opportunities, and this would be a good place to send your goods or set up shop or do this sort of thing? Do you know how we dealt with that?*

HECK: I don't think that we got too many of that sort of request, although I was working for the boss, so I didn't see the letters that went back and forth from the economic and commercial people. I just don't know. It's a good question, and I don't have an answer for it. I do believe that at that point Bombay probably had not yet overtaken Calcutta as the major business city, although it might have just begun to overtake it.

*Q: What was the role of the consul general in Bombay as far as his influence and all?*

HECK: To be a consul general in India is a rather difficult position, because the ambassador, of course, is the ambassador and yet you're a thousand miles from him. So in a way you're the vice ambassador for your region, but on the other hand, depending on what the relationship between the ambassador and the consul general is, he may want you kept on rather short leash. While I was there, our ambassador was, first of all, Chester Bowles, who was there on his second tour in New Delhi and of whose background you are probably aware. He is very much a man of the people. This was the image that he projected. He liked the glad hand, and he liked to get out in the crowds. He liked to ride a bicycle, when he was there on his first tour, with his kids around New Delhi. He was very - I'm searching for the word - not progressive necessarily but very much on that side of society, whereas my consul general, Mr. Rewinkel, of whom I was very fond, had come to this post from a career in Europe. Between him and his wife, they spoke nine languages, European languages, none of which except English they could use in Bombay, but he came from a much more old-school type of foreign service. So there was less than



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complete accord between the two, and I think he was rather circumscribed by New Delhi. He did a lot of representational type things, both in his own home and that sort of thing, but tours, sort of grand tour# sort of things, where he would go out and show the flag around the consular district, giving speeches and meeting governors and meeting chief ministers and this sort of thing; in other words, the ceremonial role was very much a part of his bailiwick. Of course, like any principal officer, he was responsible for everything else that went on in the place, and he did an awful lot of work with the business community but he had a very able number two who was in charge of the economic and commercial side of things. So I would say that basically his was a role of pro-consul for the American community and American presence. He was the flag.

*Q: Those were the days of high Cold War, and were we watching the Communist influence, the local Communist influence?*

HECK: Well, very much so in our district. I'm sure they were from Madras watching in Kerala. Our major political problem within the district at that point, aside from just watching these various things going on about whether the Shiv Sena was growing and whether it was driving out the south Indians and so on - our consular district for Bombay includes Goa. Goa had been a Portuguese colony. It's where the remains of Saint Francis Xavier are, and even today it looks very Portuguese in many ways, parts of it at least. The Indians took it over against the Portuguese will a few years previous. This was a major concern of the United States government. Of course, it didn't really matter, I suppose, so much to the American consulate general located in Bombay, India, but it made a good deal of difference in terms of American policy in Europe, because the Portuguese, of course, were very upset and they were trying to gather support amongst their friends and allies in Europe and in the United Nations. So watching what was happening in Goa was rather important for us. You know, I don't even remember what year this all took place, maybe in 1959 when basically the Indians just walked in from three sides and there was nothing the Portuguese could do except leave. It was not a bloody conflict at all. But since the take-over - however one wants to describe it - until 1964, no American diplomat was allowed



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to go to Goa. So it was a big thing in 1964, late summer of '64 or early fall, when it was decided among Washington, Delhi and Bombay, our consulate general in Bombay, that our political officer would be sent to Goa, and that was our first chance, four years later, to get any sort of feel on the ground for how things were.

*Q: Rather obscure political point. I mean one could have made it just the other way, that we paid a lot of attention. These things get rather exquisite sometimes.*

HECK: Well, yes, and I doubt very much that anyone in Lisbon cared one way or another or even noticed whether two political officers, one from New Delhi and one from Bombay, actually went to Goa in the fall of '64.

*Q: Ernie, how did another place which became rather important to both of us play at this '63 to '67 - talking about Vietnam? How did that play during that period?*

HECK: I don't think the Indian press paid much attention to it. My major knowledge of Vietnam - believe me, in this period, Stu, it might as well have been on the moon in terms of my own personal understanding of what was going on. What happened was that the Peace Corps came to India in 1964, I believe. We got Peace Corps Four. The first three groups went elsewhere, but our district got Peace Corps Four, and from then on through 1967 when I left, we had a rather large Peace Corps presence in our district. I don't remember the numbers. I would guess perhaps 100 in the district. As I remember - and this may be faulty remembrance - what they basically did was help farmers. They did an awful lot of work with chickens. I cannot tell you how important chickens were in the district at that point, because, as you know, a number of people in India are vegetarian, but some vegetarians will eat eggs if those eggs are not fertilized. So we were helping teach farmers how to improve the strains and how to have better chickens, and there was also an effort afoot by some of our PCVs, our Peace Corps Volunteers, to market veg eggs. There were veg and non-veg eggs. A veg egg meant that it was a vegetarian egg and there was not a rooster in the henhouse, and a non-veg egg meant that there was a rooster in the

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henhouse, so people could buy the kind of egg they wanted in case they were vegetarian but would be willing to eat the egg as long as no rooster had been around.

*Q: I guess that happens, doesn't it?*

HECK: That roosters come into henhouses?

*Q: No, no, I mean that a chicken lays eggs no matter what, fertile or nonfertile.*

HECK: A chicken just keeps on laying eggs, whether there's a rooster around or not. But what I remember about the Peace Corps was that it was populated with a very nice bunch of young guys. Even as the Peace Corps is today, there were a few people who were further along in their life. In fact, there were even some retired couples, a couple of them. But basically these were grad-student-age people, probably younger than the Peace Corps would get today. It was common knowledge - in fact, they would talk about it - that the reason most of these young men were there was to get out of going to Vietnam, because they wanted to avoid or perhaps they knew their numbers and their numbers were too high on the draft list. But in any case, I remember laughing at the fact that here we had all these sort of nice young boys from Brooklyn and places like that out there teaching these farmers, whose families had been there for thousands of years, how to raise chickens. Probably the only chicken you'd ever see in Brooklyn in those days was frozen and in a store somewhere. They certainly didn't have them running around the streets. I think that they would have been better off with a bunch of farm kids, but basically they weren't farm kids, they were draft dodgers or at least those who wished to avoid military service.

*Q: Who tended not to come from the farming or small town areas which tended to be more patriotic...*

HECK: And were sending their boys out to be killed.

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Q: *Be killed, yes.*

Q: *Ernie, we've sort of finished this part of India. Can you tell me - you've been in there four years - what did you think about the Foreign Service, and what did you want to make of your life?*

HECK: Well, it wasn't really four years by that point. It was about two, because joining as an officer in the Foreign Service is a long, complicated process. But along the way I decided I really liked what I was doing, and I knew that I was very lucky that I was getting a lot more responsibility than some of our junior officers were being given, because my particular consul general trusted me. So I decided I wanted to make the Foreign Service my career, and I took the written exam for the officer corps in the fall of 1966, in October or November of 1966. At that point it was a one-day written exam; it was about eight or nine hours. It's considerably less than that today, but that in turn was much shorter than what many of my friends took.

Q: *Three and a half days.*

HECK: That's right. So it was a one-day examination, and I took it in the fall of '66. In February of '67 I heard that I had passed it and I needed to come home to take the oral exam. I got my assignment curtailed, and I came home at the beginning of July of 1967, came back to Washington. I was able to take the oral examination in September of '67, and the first class which was opening was January 3 of 1968, so that's the date on which I actually joined the Foreign Service as a junior officer.

Q: *We'll pick it up at that point, but first I'd like to ask, as I do everyone, do you recall anything about the oral exam?*

HECK: Oh, yes.

Q: *All right, well, anything you can tell us about it, because I like to capture it.*

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HECK: Well, this is a completely different oral exam than what is being given today, I might add. My exam was given on a Saturday. I'm sure they don't do that anymore. In fact, I know from having participated on the other side of the table that they don't. I went into a room at which I was at a chair with a little table in front of me, and either three or four white males were sitting in front of me on a slightly raised platform with a table in front of them. We spoke for about perhaps two hours, maybe three, no more. They sent me out of the room while they voted, and they called me back in to tell me whether or not I had passed. To make me feel at home, they asked me about my life in India and what had made me interested in the Foreign Service, and then one of them said, "Well, I think it's time that we start the actual part of the examination, the serious part of the examination." This man said, "You are a junior officer at a dinner party in - I don't remember, it probably was Paris - anyway, you're at a dinner party in Europe and at the end of the dinner party somebody turns around the table and says, 'Well, you Americans, you think you're all so grand and so on, but you've not contributed anything to the United States in any form that matters at all in our literature, art, architecture or music.' How would you refute this? This gentleman said. "What would you say about those four categories?" So I started to talk, and I talked and I talked and I talked. I talked about literature, and I talked about art, and I talked about music, and I stopped. And he said, "What about architecture?" And I said, "I'm sorry. I don't know a thing about architecture." And then we went on. But at that point, I remember thinking to myself at that point that, boy, that's probably it. I learned later, of course, that the best thing you can always do in these exams is admit when you don't know rather than try to blow smoke in the face of these people, who probably know a lot more about whatever it is you're talking about than you do. But the rest of it seemed like a piece of cake after that. I mean I got by that one, and there was nothing I couldn't answer.

*Q: I was interested because - you did it later - I gave it around '75, and we were very careful to always have a woman on our panel.*

HECK: We didn't have enough women in 1967 to do that.

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*Q: Tell me, before we end this session, did you have any feel about the role of women officers in the Foreign Service at this point?*

HECK: I didn't have any feel then, but I certainly did when I went into my junior officer class and met the man, who shall be nameless, who was in charge not of the class but of the whole junior officer section of the State Department, and he certainly made it abundantly clear where women fit. It was not very high up.

*Q: We'll pick this up next time in - what are we talking about?*

HECK: That's the beginning of '68.

*Q: '68, and you've passed the oral exam and we'll pick it up coming into the Foreign Service as an officer.*

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Today is the 15th of December, Ides of December, 1997. Ernie, so you came into the Foreign Service. You had come back to Washington to come into the Foreign Service?

HECK: That's right.

*Q: Can you tell me about your Foreign Service class?*

HECK: The year I came in, 1968, we were in the process of downsizing the Foreign Service, one of the periodic exercises that we go through. In 1968 it was decided that we would cut back on the Foreign Service by cutting junior officers. That also happens with some regularity. So the year I came in, the Foreign Service only accepted I think it was 48 people. There were only two classes. My class had 23 officers of whom three were women and 20 men. During the final days of our junior officer course, which began on January 3, 1968 - and I might add that in those days you got your periodic yearly instep on July 1 if you had been in six months, so they very carefully arranged this course to be two

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days less than six months so that they could save \$200 times 23. In any case, my class of 23 was almost finished at the end of March and, of course, that was a very important time for us and for the United States because that was the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. So our entire class was basically pointed toward Vietnam. All of the single men - and most of them were single - were put into long-term Vietnamese language training to be then going out into the provinces in a program called CORDS where they worked with the military. The married men, the three women, and the one Vietnam combat veteran were assigned to Washington jobs. In those days you couldn't ask for what you wanted; you were just told where you were going. We were put in a room and called alphabetically, and it was terrible. The first man in the course got something called a Mexican-American Commission for Friendship and Border Development. It had to do with demarcating the line around El Paso down the middle of shifting a river channel for the Rio Grande, and we went from one thing like that to the next. It was really very, very, very bad. Our party at the end of the day was not a very happy one. I was assigned to work on Vietnam in INR on the South Vietnam desk, and I reported for duty and worked there on South Vietnam as a junior officer for several months. I was transferred when the Paris Peace Talks began that summer when Kissinger and Le Duc Tho and so on met - or was it Cyrus Vance and Le Duc Tho, I've forgotten now - for the meetings in Paris. I was moved over to the North Vietnam desk of INR, and I spent the rest of that year basically tracking the Paris Peace Talks. Computers seemed to be rooms big and very, very slow, so we did an awful lot of things by hand. I would go through the daily propaganda that came out of this meeting, and I would note the number of times that any particular subject was mentioned. I had graphs around the room that were tremendously big and of no value to anyone as far as I could tell, but INR seemed to like them because they could say Lay Dok To mentioned this subject six times and that one only three.

*Q: He was the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister, I guess.*

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HECK: No, he wasn't the Foreign Minister, but he was the treaty negotiator. So that's how I spent 1968 and the beginning of '69.

*Q: I'd like to go back a bit to the Foreign Service class. What was your impression of what you were taught? Here you already were a veteran of the Foreign Service and all. What did you think about it?* HECK: *I thought it was basically good. In those days you were told what you were going to be before you started, so I knew I was going to be a political officer, which is what I wanted to be. Did I learn anything particular out of the course? No, I saw it more as a bonding mechanism than perhaps a learning curve for me, but then, of course, I had had a very special sort of a background. It was useful to go out and see the CIA and to see the various government buildings. We went down to the Executive Office Building, as I remember, and a few other things, so that was useful. The bonding was useful. But other than that, I'm not sure that I learned much until I went into the three-week consular course that followed it. Of course, I never did consular work again, but I did take and pass the exam. By the time I was responsible many years later for consular matters, the law had changed so often that what I learned was of little value but it was useful.*

*Q: How did you feel about evaluating your Foreign Service class? Here you came from a very unusual background, having gone to essentially a top-notch secretarial training, going in where most of these were people who had come out of liberal arts backgrounds and all that, but you had also had your work experience under your hat and seen how the Foreign Service really worked. How did you feel you measured up?*

HECK: Oh, I thought I was every bit as good as most of them and better than some. I didn't have any problem with where I stood in the pecking order. It was fun, and I enjoyed it. The background of our people was quite varied. There were all sorts of states and kinds of universities and work experiences represented. No, I didn't have any problem with where I fit. Of course, one had to be 32 or under, I think, in those days to join the Foreign Service, so we were a much younger group than you would find today. The things that stick out in my mind: We trained with the USIA people, and I really thought the USIA

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people were top notch. I wonder now if perhaps I wouldn't have gone into USIA if I had thought about it a little bit more then. The other thing that I remember was the desperation. The youngest person in our class was 23, and he was the only bachelor that they would not take for Vietnam, the reason being - and this has stuck with me - he was short and slight and blond, and the gentleman who ran this course determined that he would not be able, therefore, to have any respect from the military with whom he would be assigned as a CORDS person. He, on the other hand, had a very, very low draft number. He knew he would be drafted, and he begged to go into the CORDS program. They wouldn't let him. Of course, he got drafted. Where did he go? He went to Vietnam, and later when he finished his Vietnamese experience and came back into the State Department, where did they send him on his first tour? Vietnam, where he was in the economics section. I think he quit almost immediately after that. But the unfairness of that, and the stupidity of the Personnel system including, I suppose, the people who worked on junior officers in that they needed bodies and it was cannon fodder going into this program of CORDS. They, therefore, sent some people who were totally unsuited for the experience. One of my classmates basically was sent to Vietnam to a fire base or to a district town someplace near the DMZ, and he lasted one night. He just absolutely fell apart when the shelling started, as it did every night, so there were some real mistakes made. But on the whole I thought that the class was very good. I enjoyed the people and the program.

*Q: It's a little hard to go back. Since Vietnam became very much a part of your thing starting right after you got out of the A-100 course, could you talk about what was your feeling during the time you got involved with the Foreign Service as an officer with A-100 and also maybe from your class about Vietnam at that peer group.*

HECK: I was not much of an activist, I guess, in that, for the previous four years when I had been in India, Vietnam was just not on the horizon. We didn't see very much about it in the Indian press, and we didn't hear very much about it in the American media that we got, which was nothing other than the USIA handouts. So I was, I guess, unprepared for the depth of resentment in the United States in 1968 for our even being there, and, of



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course, that was nothing like what it was a few years later, but the resentment was building up. While I was in Washington I also missed it in that I guess my own background was so away from the mainstream out in Oregon and then later. I just went merrily on my way doing what seemed to me to be my patriotic duty working for the State Department. It was only after I got to Vietnam that my feelings about what we were doing and how we were doing it began to perhaps change. But as long as I was in Washington, it was just a job, and I enjoyed to varying degrees at varying times. INR was not my most exciting assignment, but it was certainly peopled by very good officers and so on.

*Q: You spent almost a year in INR?*

HECK: No, not really. I got there at the end of March. I must have left around Thanksgiving, so it was only six months. The reason I left is the following: My major interest in life was still getting back to South Asia or to the developing world in general. One evening in the fall I was at a reception of some sort which was basically people from the South Asia area, and I ran into an officer, Harman Kirby, who was then working personnel issues.

*Q: Whom I have interviewed, by the way.*

HECK: And Harman told me that Ambassador Robert Newman, then the ambassador in Afghanistan, wanted a woman officer and he really didn't care whether she was USIA or whether she was State. He didn't care whether she was a junior officer or very senior. He just wanted a woman which he could use to sort of show to Afghanistan, to Kabul, that we had career people, we had professional women. This was at a time when Afghanistan had only recently, the King had only recently, decreed that his family would no longer cover themselves wearing the chador or wearing the burqa. So it was a political statement that the ambassador wanted to make. Harman asked me if I would be interested and I, of course, just grabbed at it. I had been in Afghanistan. I loved it. I wanted to go. I was fascinated, and the next day I went to my Personnel officer, who was a civil servant at that

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point. This gentleman saw me coming, and he told me that I couldn't go. He told me that I had already been assigned to a consular slot in Rio, and he told me - and I quote, this is not made up, but it is the view of a civil servant in 1968 - he said, "You've spent four years in India. We know you want to go to South Asia, and if you can't go there, you want to go to East Asia, and if you can't go there, you want to go to Africa, but," he said, "you've been in the developing world, and since it's all the same anyway, we decided we would send you to Rio to do consular work." Well, I had classmates who would have killed to go to Rio to do consular work. Me, I wasn't one of them. I wasn't interested in Latin America. I wasn't interested in being a consular officer. I wanted to be a political officer in Asia or Africa. So I went back upstairs and I was very depressed. My boss, Richard Smizer, told me that the one thing that would break this would be to go to Vietnam. Would I be willing, he said, and I said, "Absolutely, show me the way." So I was assigned. At that point I was sent down to what was called the Vietnam Working Group, which today would be the "desk," and I was then the junior officer on a very busy Vietnam Working Group desk for several months, about four, and then put into French training for five months, and then sent to Vietnam to the Political Section. So that's how I got where I went. While I was on the Vietnam Working Group, I, as the junior person among the office got the scut work which was basically congressionals at that point. I must have written 150 congressionals in a month. We just turned them out. I also had a very interesting experience at that point and one that I wish I could have kept the documents from. When President Johnson left office, he had decided that he was going to have a library in Texas, a presidential library, and the concept of the presidential library was a pretty new one at that point. He wanted to take all of his important documents with him. So I was sent down to the ground floor somewhere into a room and given all of the NODIS traffic and above that...

*Q: NODIS means...*

HECK: No distribution, very closely held telegrams or other material - it's the sort of thing that I and most people on the Vietnam Working Group, perhaps all of them, would never have seen. I was to decide what was to go to Texas and what was to stay in Washington.

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So I boxed things, and I got to read all of the traffic about the death of President Diem and the various trials and tribulations of our ambassadors there, Henry Cabot Lodge and the general, General - I want to say Ridgway, but that's not it, this is terrible not to know, it was before my time - but I got to read all of this traffic, beginning in the '50s and through the '60s, of how the American government had gotten more and more involved in the Vietnamese problem, and it was fascinating. I never knew whether they kept copies of these cables. I had this grand desire, unfilled unfortunately, to take it all with me and to put it away somewhere, because I knew I was looking at history in a way that I would probably never look at it again. I was not knowledgeable enough to know the subject well enough to be able to appreciate what I was holding in my hands, but just enough to know that I was holding some very important documents that would matter later.

*Q: While you were in INR, was there a spirit towards Vietnam other than just doing a job? At that particular time were you picking up anything about how people were looking at South Vietnam? Was it a viable government? Was this a win situation, or what were you getting?*

HECK: I was unaware at the time, but what I was getting was the beginning of what I saw in Vietnam, which was a real generation gap among the people who were working on it. The youngish officers, what I would call today junior officers although I'm sure they didn't think of themselves as that at the time, were very cynical even then and were keeping their heads down and their mouths shut basically. Now there were exceptions to this on all sides, but there seemed to be a great deal more "gunghoness" about the whole situation among the office directors and section chiefs. I think perhaps that it has to do with age and, therefore, outlook, but it was the beginning of something that became very apparent to us when we were there a little bit later, that there were honest differences about why we were there and where we were going.

*Q: By the time you went into French training, what was your feeling then?*

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HECK: I still was, if not a true believer, at least perfectly willing to believe that my government would never do anything knowingly wrong and that we were doing the best we could and that we were trying to help the people and make their lives better. I bought everything. I also bought, of course, the theory, which I suppose I no longer buy, that everything in the newspapers is right or correct or true. I had been raised in a situation where you didn't question the underpinnings of your own society, and it took me up till my late 20's while I was in Vietnam before I began to look a little differently at life and my responsibilities to my country.

*Q: While you were in INR and in the Working Group, did you run across this split between what was in the papers, which was rather negative, quite negative I would say, about our role in Vietnam, and what our people were reporting? I mean, did this play at all a role in how your outlook was formed?*

HECK: Yes, of course. I think it got worse a little bit later. Perhaps I just saw more of both the reporting and what we reported once I was in Vietnam, but most definitely there was a twist put on everything by the United States government, which was not necessarily reflected in what the press reported. I do remember that my direct supervisor on the South Vietnam side had, as one of his major bugaboos, David Halberstam. He had been in Vietnam as a reporter, had written a book on Vietnam, *The Best and the Brightest*, which, I think, had already come out at that point. But he was very cynical and querying about what the United States was doing, and my boss took it quite personally in a way that an upper middle grade civil servant shouldn't have. There was a good deal of venom apparent in even discussing the subject. As I said, I think most of the sort of lower and up to mid-grade officers were tending to kind of keep their heads down and not let their feelings be too known in front of the authority in the department.

*Q: You took French for five months, 20 weeks. What was the theory? Why were you taking French and not Vietnamese?*

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HECK: They needed me in five months instead of 20. It was easier to get somebody off of language probation in French than in Vietnamese, of course, which is a very difficult tonal language. The program for French was then 20 weeks. The program for Vietnamese was 44. So there's one big answer. But, of course, it was in effect useless in Vietnam. You could talk to the cook in sort of pigeon French about what you wanted made for dinner, but really the only other person to whom I ever spoke French was the man who washed my car and it was also pigeon French because he knew even less than I. So there was no need for people like me to have French in those days in Vietnam. People up on the hierarchy in Vietnam could use French. The leadership in many cases spoke excellent French, had gone to French schools, and someone like my minister counselor for political affairs, Martin Hertz, who later became ambassador to, I think, Bulgaria, used his French all the time, but he was dealing with cabinet ministers. I was dealing with captains in the army who were on civilian detail somewhere, in Saigon, for instance, or with people who already had better English than I had French. So I did my job basically in English, and I think most of the people at my grade did everything in English or they used a translator. If they were on the visa line and had to speak to someone who only had Vietnamese, somebody else helped them with their interviews. So there really was very little reason to have French.

*Q: You arrived in Vietnam and you were there from when to when?*

HECK: I was in Vietnam from July of 1969 until the end of May/beginning of June 1971, so I had about 22 months.Q: What was your job?

HECK: I was one of the political section officers. We had, of course, a very big embassy, and there were a number of people from other agencies who were under cover as political officers, but the real State Department political officers when I got there were 23 in the embassy proper and that's not counting the ones who were out in various CORDS jobs reporting political things. When I left, there were 17, and in both instances I was the junior officer of the lot, but the people who were coming in behind me were more junior than

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I. So I was the odds and ends person. You can imagine, when you try to divide a pie, which really represents only Saigon city and the national government, Foreign Ministry, the courts that were located in the city but didn't include a lot of the reporting from the field - you really get into things in great depth when you have 23 people running around covering these things. We had an internal section and external section of Political, Military, and Labor - there's one more - but in any case, there were five sections in the Political Section. Each section had a section chief, and we had a political counselor, a political military counselor, a deputy ambassador who was himself an ambassador, and an ambassador. So the hierarchy that breathed down our necks about what we reported was big. The first thing that one ran into when one got to Saigon as a political officer in 1969 was that what the front office believed and reported and what junior officers believed and tried to report and were thwarted in reporting were two entirely different versions of what was happening. There was tremendous bitterness among many of the officers, great cynicism among many of the officers, because they couldn't get their thoughts across, they couldn't tell it as they saw it. They kept getting overridden by the powers that be. I don't think that the people who were in those senior positions were being hypocritical or dishonest; I think they actually saw it that way. They were insulated. They were doing so many things which didn't get them down among the people, that when somebody whom they respected, like a general, told them something, they believed it, and the general in turn believed it because somebody told him that. So the stuff that got to the ambassador and the deputy ambassador was a far cry from what the more junior officers were seeing and reporting. So there was a real chasm in the embassy between the people who led it and the rest of us, not that we didn't in many cases greatly respect these senior officers or political appointees but we just saw a completely different war, and I think that permeated the entire mission. Correct me if I'm...

*Q: Just for the record, during most of this period I was consul general sitting in an office to one side, and I was just doing consul general work. Ernie, let's talk about the two sides you*

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*mentioned, the junior officers. How did work and reports come to you, and what were you getting, and what was your particular area?*

HECK: As I said, I was the absolute junior-most of this lot, so I didn't get a heck of a lot of real reporting. My responsibilities were the Supreme Court and the hierarchy that supported it, the court system in the capital city, who were not part necessarily of the political mainstream, and Saigon City itself, something called the SCAG, the Saigon Civil Action Group, the military and civilian organization which ran the city of Saigon, which then had about 3,000,000 people as I remember. I also did the real scut work, the weekly report. There was a weekly cable that went out every, I think, Tuesday evening with all of the things that were not important enough to send separate messages on but had to be reported, and that was mine; and finally, biographical reporting and with it all the things that go along, making lists of future leaders and various committees, dealing with USIS to identify perhaps the journalists who were going to become something or the cultural people who were going to become something in the hierarchy. So it really was not an exciting political job where I got to do a lot of my own reporting, but a lot of people with whom I worked did, and they would come back absolutely frustrated, particularly the guys who worked across the hall from me who did provincial reporting. They were responsible for various provinces of the country, divided by corps, by the four military corps, and they did go to their corps a lot and they did do reporting on what was happening in the field. They came back telling one story, and they could never get it past the political minister-counselor, or maybe it could get that far and it would never get out of the front office. They were, to a man, very frustrated. I should mention that they were all men. In this group of 23, there were two women when I came; and when I left, I was the only woman. We didn't have a lot of women in Saigon anywhere. There were a few women in the Consular Section, a few women in the Economic Section, almost none in the Political Section. From that comes a story of how those of us who were women were resented. Specifically those of us who were in political or economic work were resented. The old embassy had been down on the Saigon River when Henry Cabot Lodge was ambassador. There had been, as



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there often was, a bomb attempt. A bomb had been thrown at the old embassy, and some people were injured. I believe several were killed. This would have been in the mid-'60s. Apparently there had been some snafus at that point about how it was reported and what happened. Ambassador Lodge said to somebody in the embassy, "From now on I only want men who are political and economic officers to be the duty officer, because Mr. X loused it up somehow." That word was apparently chiseled into stone. Of course, Henry Cabot Lodge had no women in the political or economic sections, so when he said "men in the political or economic section," he just meant people, we thought. For the period that I was there, no woman could be a duty officer. Well, being a duty officer in Saigon was unlike being a duty officer in most places. You lived at the embassy, you slept next to the communications unit, you were on the front lines for a week. It wasn't that you took your little radio home to answer phone calls in the middle of the night. You were there and you were the operations center for the embassy. By having maybe three or four women in the embassy at that point, it meant that everybody's turn came up four weeks earlier if they were men in either of those two sections. These men with whom we worked didn't like it, and, of course, they had every right not to like it. It was unfair to them, and we thought, we women, it was unfair to us. We wanted to actually be the duty officer. If we were going to be the officer, let us do it. Our front office in that period, '69 to '71, would not change the regulation. They didn't want any women in harm's way, I suppose. So we were not allowed to do it, and it was a constant thorn in the side. When anybody got a little annoyed about something, it was always something to be thrown at any of the four women.

*Q: When you say there was a split, what was coming in from the provinces that wasn't going out?*

HECK: Well, first of all, that our troops weren't doing as well as perhaps they were being reported to be doing. There was the infamous body county, about which, I'm sure, others have reported, but the military and USIA - we had a press czar, as it were, a USIA senior officer - ran something called the Four O'clock Follies, or the Five O'clock Follies. In any case, it was a daily press briefing, and there were always these very neat little statistics,



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that we had killed X number in this little skirmish here or there, or this many were killed on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in such and such a province, or whatever, but there were always statistics which were dubious at best and didn't necessarily mean that anyone had actually seen a body. A lot of it was sort of by guess and by gosh and extrapolation and inference and so on. Our men would come back from provincial reporting and say, "This place where we were supposed to have killed 18, it didn't happen, man, it didn't happen that way." Or they would come back and say that the district chief, who would be a mid-ranking military officer in the Vietnamese army, was very corrupt and that he was doing X and Y and selling X and Y in terms of weapons and shaking people down and so on. Some of them were excellent officers. Others of them were corrupt, but the story we were putting out in those days was that they were all excellent officers, they were all terribly patriotic men who were fighting for democracy and the American way in Vietnam. The awful truth of it was that by 1969 there had been fighting in Vietnam for almost 30 years, first against the Japanese and then the French and then the war that started after 1954's settlement of the division of the country temporarily. I think what most of us finally saw is that Vietnam was a very complicated place and that there were a lot of people in Vietnam whose loyalty truly was only to his extended family. After that many years of fighting, any of us, I think, would be very cynical about what we were doing, and our major interest in life would be protecting those we love and care about. Some of this other twaddle that we were putting out was very simplistic and just didn't hit the mark at all. So this is the sort of stuff that our younger officers would come back with, and of course it wasn't right, because we had this story which was still one of optimism and we were always just about to break the back of the enemy and we were just about to have another breakthrough and so on and so on and so on. It got very nasty, and basically there was a great deal of telling junior officers to shut up. There was no real dissent channel of the kind we had later on. You couldn't do too much other than complain, and I think that many of the seniors felt that some of these junior people were then spewing it all forth to American press, who were more than happy to pick up some of these stories and play it back to the United States. So it was an

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unhappy sort of a place in terms of trust and camaraderie amongst different parts of the same mission.

*Q: Was there any effort within the political and upper reaches of the embassy to get together from time to time with provincial reporting officers or others, to talk to the ambassador, to the deputy ambassador or to the chief of the Political Section?*

HECK: Well, certainly in the Political Section we had staff meetings and things like that, so, yes, there was an opportunity to do that. I do not remember any efforts made to do that with the front office. It may have been there. I just didn't know about it.

*Q: Front office means the ambassador?*

HECK: The ambassador and the so-called deputy ambassador, who at that point was Ambassador Samuel Berger, who had been ambassador to Korea, a very important job. The reason for having what we would normally call the deputy chief of mission as an ambassador, and using his title with abandon was that it had been determined, I suppose in Washington, although maybe in Saigon, that the U.S. military wouldn't listen to anybody who didn't have the title of ambassador. So, it was decided that our embassy would be headed by two ambassadors, both of them using the title, so that they could have more weight with the military leadership. That had been General Westmoreland and then it became General Abrams just after I got there.

*Q: Did you find that in a way the spirit of the military - I'm talking about the American military - was permeating the embassy? There's usually more of a free flow in an embassy, but it sounds as though it was mostly the junior officers or mid-career officers. You don't talk up and all. Would you say we had absorbed a military structure within the embassy?*

HECK: I think we had to a certain extent, certainly after Tet. One of the more stupid, if I may say so, decisions about how to man the embassy came into play in terms of absorbing the military culture. In the Tet offensive in March of 1968, in the aftermath

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of that, the military - I believe it was General Westmoreland - determined that it was unfair that the boys in the foxholes, the men out in the field, the guys in the fire bases, had no regular working hours. They just had to be out there for a certain period of time, and they had to do whatever had to be done, whereas the men in military headquarters had fixed hours. So a decision was made at that point to expand the fixed hours and to cut out any days off. The military then after Tet went on to the seven-day-a-week, 52-weeks-a year routine and, I believe, had very long hours. Certainly then the State Department picked up on this, or at least the civilians, so by the time I got there the official embassy hours were seven a.m. to seven p.m. or seven-thirty a.m. to seven-thirty p.m., whatever it was. A 12-hour day was our official day. We, of course, had a curfew, so it didn't leave a heck of a lot of time at the end of the day for anything. The first year I was there, we had no days off. We worked seven days a week, we worked Thanksgiving, we worked Christmas, we worked New Years, we worked the Fourth of July, we just went to work seven days a week. This was offset, of course, by frequent trips out of country, either rest and rehabilitation provided by the State Department or trips on military R&R flights where they would give a few seats to the civilians too so that we did get some respite from all this, but officially we were working 365 days a year. The second year I was there, we were allowed Christmas and Thanksgiving off, I believe. Of course, you don't get your best out of people who are having to do work with their brains on that sort of a schedule. It's just one more of the things that seemed sort of senseless, because certainly we had the personnel to cover the place seven days a week. We could have allowed people to have a day off occasionally, but it just didn't happen that way. There was obviously, although I was certainly not privy to it, a great deal of tugging between the civilian leadership and the military leadership in Vietnam. Now that is, of course, a problem that sometimes comes up no matter where an ambassador may be posted, if he has, in fact, combat troops in his area or if in fact he has a significant military establishment, American military establishment, in that area. Relations between the civilian and the military are not necessarily a bed of roses in those situations.

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I do remember, for instance - and this is just something I thought about a minute ago that I wanted to mention - the idea of whether or not our front office understood what was going on amongst the people. They had, of course, very important problems to deal with, and I am not trying to second guess them, but just one story that illustrates this. The major military PX was located in the Chinese area called Cho Lon some distance from the embassy. We at the embassy would occasionally go out there to buy our food and other items that we needed. It was also, by the way, open to allies, so you would see at this place soldiers from some of our allied countries in Asia going first to the area to buy the suitcase and then going to the cosmetic counters to buy a suitcase full of cosmetics to ship back to their native places.

*Q: They would be marched in. I saw Thai soldiers. I'm told the Koreans didn't do this, because that was all arranged for them. They were given packs when they left.*

HECK: Well, the Thais certainly did it, and they would pick up their suitcase first and then go to the cosmetics or to the electronics, whatever we had, and buy it out. In any case, on that long drive, we would normally pass the central food market which was near the old opera house that had become the parliament. Then there would be this half-hour drive out to the place, particularly around the central food market, where our people would go to get vegetables and fresh meat and things like that. There was a long line of grandmotherly women squatting on the pavement usually with a little box in front of them. On that box would be something like a Sears catalog. Very often it was the Sears catalog. Anybody could stop there and they could pick out what they wanted to order, and those women would deliver it to them. They had a fixed time, like three weeks, and within three weeks that item from the American Sears catalog would be delivered to whichever Vietnamese wanted it. I remember telling this to my so-called deputy ambassador, Ambassador Berger, and he refused to believe it, as he never had to drive by the food market. He never saw the catalogs and he didn't realize the amount of American goods which were coming in surreptitiously into the country. He wasn't thinking about things like that. Of course,

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that's part of the corruption that weakened the society and became a bone of contention in the United States later. So it's all intermingled. Obviously there were Americans involved in forwarding those orders through some sort of APO, and I'm sure that great money was made. I know of people who lost their jobs for having dealt in diamonds as government officials, civilian officials. Shortly before I left - well, first of all, I should say that the major drink of choice among many men in Vietnam was cognac or brandy, and that it was drunk in large amounts. Particularly, I think, among the Chinese Vietnamese but also throughout Saigon it was a major drink. The river port that our things came into was a place called Newport on the Saigon River not far from Saigon City, and shortly before I left, an entire truck of Hennessy was diverted from a convoy moving from Newport to Cho Lon to the commissary. Now, this convoy had MPs on every truck, and it had an MP leading the herd, and a truck disappeared. Well, obviously the MPs, some MP at least, was involved in this, and a truckload of Hennessy would be worth a great amount of money. It wasn't just a civilian American who was involved in this; there had to be military also involved in it. There was a great deal of that, and our front office wouldn't see it. I also remember, by the way, gift wrapping a leg of lamb once for President Mun Van Tie from my ambassador, who had ordered from the commissary a frozen leg of lamb to give the President of Vietnam. I remember gift wrapping it, which seemed to me a strange thing for me to be doing as a political officer, but then there you are.

*Q: What was your impression, albeit from a distance, of Ambassador Bunker?*

HECK: A man of great integrity, great dignity. I adored him. He didn't want to be there, but he was just too patriotic a man to not be there. I'm sorry that that was his last appointment with the U.S. government, because I think he deserved better. I think that the snakepit that was Vietnam at that time tended to tarnish all of the people who were there, certainly all of the seniors who were there. But I had great respect for him, as I did, for that matter, for the deputy ambassador, Sam Berger. Personally I found them both very impressive men, and I kept in touch with Ambassador Bunker afterwards, particularly because I had worked for his wife, Ambassador Carol Laise, and she was a friend. The last time I saw him was

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I was his control officer in New Delhi in '85 just a few months before he died. I thought very highly of him, but I'm not sure that he's the person who should have been there. For one thing, he was not mean enough and tough enough perhaps in the sense of what we perhaps needed in order to make the civilian side of the equation more a part of the play on the ground in Vietnam. I don't know. I think I was in too low a position to actually make a judgment on that.

*Q: You had at least two officers of the Political Section - what would they be, political counselors? - Martin Hertz and then Galen Stone?*

HECK: No, Martin Hertz was the minister counselor. Galen Stone and Lauren Askew were the two counselors whom I had at the time. Both Galen Stone and Lauren Askew were very senior men at the top of the pecking order of the Foreign Service, and there they were reporting to three people above them. It was an extraordinary experience. Q: Did you have any feeling about how they were dealing with things, because at a certain level if you've got all these young junior officers reporting up and then they in turn are reporting up? It sounds like it was sort of an incestuous operation.

HECK: The hierarchy was ridiculously complicated, and also most of the men in the senior positions had no Asian experience as far as I know. The Asianists, such as they were, were at the next level down as heads of the section. My head of the political internal unit, which is where I fit into this thing - I had two heads of the political internal unit, and they were both Asianists and had a better feel for the complications of the society and the personalities involved perhaps than people further up the line. But I have a feeling that form got in the way so much that substance was secondary all the time. When you have to think of jobs that really matter, for instance, for 23 political officers, you're really down there into the form rather than substance category.

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*Q: Isn't there a problem when you get too many people that almost too much information is out there and you have people who are too busy with almost the administration of the thing?*

HECK: Absolutely. I'm sure that nothing that I did was ever looked at by anyone in Washington other than the very junior-most of people, and I suspect that's probably true up the line. The fifth section in the Political Section, which I did not mention, was the Labor Division. I don't know that anyone in Washington really cared about labor in Vietnam. It was just tertiary to the problem. And political military - what does that mean in a country where every male over the age of 15 seems to be in a uniform, and so on and so on. I'm sure we could have slashed the whole section by 50 percent and things would have been better.

*Q: Did you have any feel with the reporting? Granted, this was a place that sometimes the junior reporting officers were able to get their feelings out, their experiences out to the world, but did you also have a feeling about the press, about what was driving them? Was it an adversarial situation by this time or not?*

HECK: The press was full of very bright young men who went on to greater things later. I'm thinking, for instance, of Bob Kaiser from the Washington Post, men like that. I think, without having asked anybody about this, I think they saw themselves as the protectors of American honesty, that somehow they had to let people know back in the United States what was really happening. In many ways they didn't know any more than any of the rest of us, but they certainly did see an awful lot of very awful things in their travels around Vietnam which were not a part of the Five O'clock Follies, and they made sure that that got out, and I think for that they did something that was probably very important. The whole issue of the Vietnam War, I guess, was sort of a loss of innocence for a lot of us. Suddenly we weren't the good guys. We had been the good guys in World War II, and we most definitely saw ourselves as being the good guys in the Korean War against those awful North Koreans and so on, and the Chinese Communist threat rolling over with real

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Chinese coming down off of the Yaladoo River. But it wasn't so easily understood, it wasn't so black and white in Vietnam. Yes, there was a lot of corruption on our side. There were rights and wrongs on both sides. I don't think we were used at that point to dealing with the fact that maybe we weren't always the white hats in situations like this or that we might be thrown into something where we would be forced to do something against perhaps our own heritage. Then, of course, there was this added fillip of the problems in the military itself. I mean, this was the time when enlisted men were so-called fragging their superiors by throwing grenades into closed areas where a superior might be. There was a great deal of social ferment in the military as well as in the civilian world - what did we say - back in the world, back in the United States. So it was an ugly time. I think for me personally, a lot of what I came out of Vietnam with is personal and not having to do with job, but it was a very strange thing to be a young, single woman in Vietnam, an American woman I mean, when there weren't many young, single, American women in Vietnam. Of course, there were nurses and so on, but there surely weren't very many in total, and we were in a very strange situation. I have a lot of sort of almost half-guess remembrances about the strangeness of life there that will stick with me till the end of my days. It was a place which was unhappy, aside from the war, just the civilian life there in Saigon was a very, very weird situation.

*Q: Did you find that there was sort of a junior officer mafia that would sit around and...*

HECK: Oh, absolutely. And, of course, we had been told collectively, perhaps not each of us singly, but it was a widely used line in Washington that our careers would jump forth from here on because we had served our country by going to Vietnam. Well, of course, this didn't happen, as we all know now, but this was a line that Personnel tended to be feeding us, that you'd get the next assignment that you wanted, you'd get promotions faster than others, you were all going to be ambassadors. Anyway, there was a great deal of sitting around with junior officers at parties and even in the office and griping, and it was very much an us-versus-them, us the junior officers versus the rest of the contingent out



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there. It tended to make us join in groups against the sort of vague senior enemy out in the hierarchy there.

*Q: Looking back on it, did you feel that this gap between the senior officers and the junior officers might have also had something that I think I noticed? When you get to being older and all, you've sort of seen it all and you realize that the world isn't a very perfect place. There is, you might say, more tolerance for corruption, for things not working as well and all. One of my problems as a supervisor has always been to get young officers to accept the fact they're going to be lied to and not to take it too personally.*

HECK: I think what you're saying is right, and I think a lot of what we had in Vietnam was just a reflection of what was happening in our society, which was in ferment back in the United States, and it didn't all have to do with the Vietnam War. Q: This was really the '60s hitting it.

HECK: That's right. This was the time of pavement stones being thrown in the streets in Paris and so on. All over the Western world there was ferment among social groups, the young people against the rest sort of thing, and Vietnam was only one part of that. That's very true. It was an unhappy time, I think, in general for us as a country.

*Q: At that time - because we're trying to go to the time and not how we saw it later on - did you see South Vietnam as being a viable place, and maybe with your other people, and what was sort of the prediction of...*

HECK: My prediction, for what it's worth: One of the things that got on my plate was sort of once a month lecturing to newly arrived people in Saigon, which meant largely people working for USAID and military officers, middle grade and below, who were going to be working in headquarters, at Totsena, Binmore, places like that, but doing jobs which were not going to be in the field. So once a month or so I would go out and I would give the political briefing to this group which usually was 20 to 40 people, almost all men. I do know that the line that I was using in that period, '70 and '71 - I didn't start this until the end '69

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- was basically that what we had done for Vietnam was to give them some time, but they were going to have to do it on their own. My personal opinion was that it wouldn't last five years, and in fact it didn't last five years. We pulled out. We basically were out of there by '72, and, of course, Vietnam fell in April of '75. I didn't want to be right, but I was right, and it didn't last very long after large numbers of American fighting troops left the area.

*Q: What was your impression of the American military officers you would be seeing? I assume they would be around the captain/major level and all. I mean on a social scene or in business and all, what were you getting from them, your impression of them?*

HECK: I think perhaps the group that I dealt with most closely came out of Tan Son Nhut from the intelligence side of things, and we - we meaning a number of my friends and I working in the Political Section - spent a lot of time with these. They were basically captains, a few lieutenants. They were very cynical themselves. The best of them were very cynical. They were great fun, but they were cynical. So even in the military there were divisions and fissures. One of them went on to become a political appointee in the State Department during the Republican years. That was Chuck Misener, who then died with Ron Brown in Dubrovnik, near Dubrovnik in the former Yugoslavia in the mid-'90s/early '90s, as an official, high-ranking official, of the Department of Commerce. I remember that he particularly was - he and his buddy who was a relative of a Foreign Service officer with whom I had worked - they were very, very cynical, every bit as much as our provincial reporters who were telling it like it was. I'm sure that permeated the military in headquarters offices.

*Q: Just looking back, did those who had served in Vietnam, in your experience later in the Foreign Service, did that create a bond or something that was different than maybe other postings or not, or do you have any feel for that?*

HECK: I think a lot of people who were in Vietnam remained close to each other, at least more close than most. You had been through a great deal when you had been through

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Vietnam together. Aside from the fighting, I mean just the weird world that we lived in as government officials, civilian government officials, was enough to keep us bonded through the next 30 years, and, yes, we see each other even today, some of us. Of course, people's careers have gone their own ways, but it's something that we will always look back upon and can share. A number of us, I think, do not talk a great deal about Vietnam except among people who have been there, and obviously this is a pool of people who had been there and know what you mean when you say a certain thing or refer to a certain incident. It was a very strange place, you will have to agree.

*Q: We both share that experience. What was the feeling towards President Nixon?*

HECK: Well, I don't think he was particularly trusted by those of us who were over there - as a group, I mean. There was a good deal of resentment about his various orders to bomb inside of Cambodia, which brought the Cambodians into the war full time, the various machinations around stopping bombing on certain holidays in the North and then starting it up again, but that may have reflected the society as a whole. I don't think that President Nixon's strength lay among people under the age of 40, even back in, as we called it, the world, and certainly out in Vietnam there was a good deal of cynicism, but more so about his minions, because they were the ones who then had to make the various policy announcements. I would say that this was also true of how people felt about Johnson when he was the President and about his people. You remember the way that poor Robert MacNamara was looked at by certainly people of my level in the State Department. No, it was a time when one didn't trust necessarily one's own government in large part, and we, like all the others in the country, I guess, we were being buffeted about by the same winds. It's an experience that I was not unhappy to leave. In Vietnam we would say, "So many days and a wake-up," and I think the civilians counted that as much as anybody else. You're going to leave in two months, so it's sixty days and a wake-up, and on that wake-up morning you're out of there, and the civilians were every bit as eager to get that way as, I think, the average grunt or the average headquarters officer.

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*Q: What was your impression, and maybe of your colleagues in the Political Section, of the work of the CIA?*

HECK: Well, it was a pretty shadowy organization in Vietnam in that I didn't have a lot of interaction, other than social with some of the junior officers amongst them, but the head of the CIA was something of a pro-consul, and that was kind of frightening. I had one run-in with one of the heads of the CIA - because I think there were two during my time. First of all, the Political Section had asked me to become friendly with a leftist woman lawyer in Saigon who was suspected of being a conduit to the Viet Min and by extension to North Vietnam. I did this, and I saw quite a bit of her for six months or so, and then I was told to drop it, that I was to not see her again. So, being a good soldier and so on, I dropped it and I did not see her again. Well, one Saturday afternoon quite late in the day, I was called up to the sixth floor and into the lair of the gentleman who was the chief of station and the pro-consul.

*Q: The sixth floor was the CIA floor?*

HECK: The sixth floor was the CIA floor, and this particular gentleman in effect accused me of not following orders and seeing this woman, and reported to me that I had been seen - and more importantly, my car, which was quite unusual, it was a Chevrolet whatever they were called, a jazzy little sports car...

*Q: Camaro or something?*

HECK: Chevrolet Camaro, and there weren't a lot of them in Saigon. My car and I had been seen at a funeral at Binwon north of Saigon in the company of this lady, and he really raked me over the coals. Well, first of all, I had never seen the woman again. I hadn't spent my Saturday at a funeral, but more to the point, I didn't work for this man, I didn't report to this man, and he had no right shaking me down like that. In effect, it was sort of an interrogation, and it went on for what seemed to me to be a very long time. I'm sure

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it wasn't, but it really shattered me. Now, what I should have told him to do was go take a big jump off of a pier somewhere and to leave me alone, and I should have reported it to my own hierarchy, and I didn't. I just crept home and was afraid of this man and his organization, which was a stupid thing to do because, of course, he had no right to deal with me that way. But there was a good deal of that sort of thing, of the CIA being an organization unto itself in Vietnam. Now whether they did a good job or not in the field, I don't know. I have visited friends who were CIA and in charge of their organization for certain parts of Vietnam. A man I had worked with in Bombay was down in the far part of the South, and I had spent some time visiting him once. So I look at it in something of a patchwork, but I think that it was just one more of the problems that we had in Vietnam of the dichotomy of the divisions between the civilian leadership and the separate little fiefdoms which ran on their own, and I certainly put the CIA in one of those as a very important fiefdom.

*Q: Oh, boy! You were there - we were both there - during a time when somebody really kicked over the milk bucket in the United States, and that was in May of '70 when the United States went into Cambodia for a bit. What was the reaction, your personal reaction and maybe the younger people around you at that time?*

HECK: I think there was a great groundswell of feeling that this was a stupid move on our part, that it wasn't going to destroy the fact that the enemy, the Vietnamese, whether it be the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese troops per se, could still get refuge in that part of the world inside the borders of Cambodia. The sad part of it was that the government of Cambodia couldn't control the movement of the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese troops through its own region. It didn't make any difference in the long term, therefore. It didn't stop anything. If these was indeed a Viet Cong headquarters in the Perinspeke or elsewhere inside of Cambodia, we never found it. All the talk about the caches of arms and so on was that, just talk, efforts to make it look like we had actually gone in and succeeded in stopping something when we didn't. What I saw, and I think what a lot of people saw, was that we really ruined the country, because we dragged into the war

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Cambodia, which had, no matter how tenuously, been able to stay out of the war until that point. Prince Sihanouk was and is and remains a very slippery, crafty, Machiavellian politician, and we had a lot of reasons for not liking what he was doing, but he did in fact keep his country out of this. In the aftermath of our going in, we dragged the country in. He departed. Lon Nol came in. I remember being over in Phnom Penh shortly after this happened and after our attacks in 1970 - I think it was in April of '70, but whatever, when we went in - and watching what looked like college boys in trucks going to the front. This is, of course, not the first time in the world that this has happened, but here are these kids with no real idea what they were getting into "going to the front in the back of an open-bedded truck" with no particular preparation. The things that happened to Cambodia in the years that followed up to '79 all go back to that day ten years earlier, and I think that we bear a great responsibility for what ultimately became the killing fields and then became the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, which actually brought some calm to the area, and we are, therefore, somewhat responsible for the rather tenuous position that the country finds itself in today. So I think we have a little bit on our shoulders there to bear.

*Q: Okay, Ernie, why don't we stop today. We finished Vietnam. We're in 1971, and whither?*

HECK: And whither: back to the Foreign Service and out of Vietnam. My next assignment was to Hindi language training, and then I did something that I had to sort of pull off. I got married, because it was all getting to the point where women could stay in the Foreign Service and get married. That's where we'll pick it up.

*Q: Okay, very good.*

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Today is the 18th of December 1997. Ernie, I don't want to let something go. I thought about it, and I think I've got to ask you. When you were talking about being a single woman in Vietnam and every once in a while you'd sort of cock your eyebrow and say it's

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something else. Can you comment a little more on that, because I try to catch some social history while I'm at it?

HECK: Social history. I found my experience in Vietnam to be very, very strange all along. There were things that happened there that you just couldn't believe in terms of a normal life. But I just remember some very, speaking personally, some very strange episodes that have stuck in my mind. One of them was having dinner one night with a colonel or a lieutenant colonel from the Army, our Army, on top of the - is it the Brinks or the Rex? - the Rex that had the restaurant on the roof. We were sitting there having this surf and turf or whatever it was called in the '70s, anyway a very rich meal, looking out, and you could see over across the river. You could see the tracer bullets, as I think I told you later. There was a fire fight going on across the river and they had called in helicopter support, which had to be American helicopter support, and there we were having our dinner and talking about other things, and right outside the window there was the war. It didn't seem to affect people, it was just part of life there, part of the background. I had trouble with that. I also had trouble that night just talking to this colonel, because he was about to retire or resign - I'm not sure which it was, probably retire after 20 years - and he was already building his new career, which was to buy and sell brass shell casings. Of course, brass shell casings, in terms of the Vietnam War, were huge things. They were the size of the gadgets that Victorians put on their floor to collect umbrellas. They were 20 inches high and 10 inches across and very heavy with brass, and he was going to send all this stuff to I think it was Taiwan and he was going to make a million, and he probably did make a million. For a colonel to be talking about the economic implications of his post-war activity while this fire fight was going on - that sort of thing really bothered me. I'm sure that others have talked about the experience that many single women had. We didn't have a lot of single women. We were a small group. Women who lived in the larger apartment buildings that the U.S. government had taken over would get knocks on the door at night and some elderly lady would be basically auctioning off some young woman, Vietnamese, to the people who lived in the building. They expected to get men at each door, of course, because 85 or

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90 percent of the people in these apartments were men. It was a very common thing, as you know, for a large number of our civilian compatriots to have this sort of thing. The women in these buildings got quite inured to the fact that if somebody knocked on the door between about seven and nine, it was probably something like this unless they were expecting guests. That bothered me. The occasional forays into the officers' clubs bothered me. I do remember going out to Tan Son Nhut to the large officers' clubs out there, and they had three of them, I mean there were three levels. There was one for the junior officers of the military, and then there was one for the sort of majors and colonels, and then there was one for the generals. I never got into the one for the junior officers, but I did see the one for the majors and colonels and the one for the generals, and they were absolutely alike except one of them had an avocado carpet and one of them had a mustard-green carpet, but they had the same sort of food and the same sorts of bands from the Philippines and so on, and all the generals had little individual trailers out behind. This sort of lifestyle I found almost offensive. This was supposed to be a war zone. A great deal of it seemed like it was somebody's idea of what a military base should be in Hawaii in civilian times. That's what I meant. It was not a happy place. First of all, we weren't there for any sort of social life, but as you know yourself, Stu, how many of the men in our large civilian contingent were there for reasons extraneous to wanting to serve their country. They were getting away from a marriage or they were earning a lot of money because they couldn't afford the number of dependents they had at home and they weren't there to do any particular good for whatever projects they were working on.

*Q: It was sort of a boom-town mentality, I think, and almost one thinks of maybe the people who gathered around when there was a gold rush up in Alaska.*

HECK: Exactly, exactly.

*Q: Plus some very hard-working - and most people were hard working, but it didn't translate very well.*



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HECK: No, it certainly didn't. Anyway, let's go on to something happier than Vietnam.Q: Absolutely. So you left there in 1971, and then what?

HECK: Well, I had been assigned to something that I had wanted to do, which was to go back to India, and I was scheduled to go into a Hindi language training program, a long term, which means nine months, of Hindi. I had studied Hindi in Bombay on my own, taken private lessons and so on, but we really didn't use much Hindi in Bombay. Going to Delhi would mean actually going to a place where the language was spoken. So I went back to Washington and enrolled in a nine-month Hindi course. I was the only student, and I had a marvelous Indian Muslim teacher who, among other things, loved film, so we would very often take field trips to see the kind of artsy films that didn't play in most theaters and then we would spend the afternoon talking about this film, so we would justify this. It was fun, and I enjoyed him and I enjoyed the class. It could have been awful when you're in a one-on-one, but this one was good. Along the way I decided to get married. This had a lot more importance, I suppose, to an officer's life, a woman officer's life, than it would today, because the State Department had just in the previous nine months changed the rules. Up until that point, no woman could marry anybody in the American Foreign Service. You turned in your resignation at the time you announced your marriage, and it didn't matter if you were marrying an American ambassador, another Foreign Service officer, an American journalist, a Soviet spy. It was all the same. You turned in your resignation, and you were expected to resign, because obviously women couldn't work and have a career. Times have really changed. But anyway, so there I was, shortly after the rule had been changed, deciding to do this, afraid to tell the State Department because I really wanted to get my language out of the way. Not that I was on language probation - I was not - but to get my training out of the way. I felt that for a number of reasons I just could not announce to the State Department until it was very close to the wedding that I was in fact going to get married, although I had decided by Christmas of that year that I would get married in March. So I went through this course until March, when I had had enough Hindi to get the requisite three - that's sort of middle grade - language competency, and then I told

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them that I was quitting and marrying. I was not resigning from the Foreign Service, but I was getting married and I was going to go to Iran, where my future husband was posted. And that is what I did. I gave them about a week's notice and turned in my badge, as it were, although not really, and went out to the West Coast. He came home from Iran and we went to the West Coast and got married and flew back to Iran, all within a period of a week.

*Q: Well now, what was the situation? Could you say, "I'm getting married," and then go to India or go to Iran? Was this in the cards?*

HECK: Do you mean did I have a choice on what I did?

*Q: Yes.*

HECK: It was so early on after they had changed the rules that I don't know. The system, State Department, hadn't really gotten used to the idea of split families, certainly not split from long distances. I don't think that it even occurred to me that that was an option at that point, as it would today, of course, if it were to happen.

*Q: Well, there was the one that we knew of, and that was Ellsworth Bunker and Carol Laise.*

HECK: That's true. They were both ambassadors when they were married, but because they were ambassadors, they were out of the Foreign Service system and they didn't get hit with the sort of rules that you or I would have been hit with on something like this, because they were both Presidential appointments. But there hadn't been, so far as I know, any case of any family being separated by more than a very short distance at that point. There were also some very strict regulations about whether or not the spouse - that meant usually the woman, because I don't know that there were any examples in early '72 of cases where women officers married a man and then the man became the dependent spouse - but there were nepotism rules which just had to be seen to be believed or heard

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to be believed, because the State Department had not yet figured out how to handle this sort of thing. They had, I think, probably been forced against their better judgment into allowing them to be married, and they were feeling their way, the Department was feeling its way at that point. In any case, men officers who married a woman officer, if the man, who was usually the more senior of the two just by function of ages that people get married in - if this were the case, the woman very often was not supposed to work if the man had any sort of responsibility within the embassy. These nepotism rules went back to things that had been put into place because of malfeasance or at least hanky-panky on Capitol Hill going back years, where senators or representatives would put their wives on the payroll and give them what amounted then to tremendous salaries to basically do nothing, thereby tying up one of their staff positions and bringing home some extra money for the family. That's where the rules started. They didn't have anything to do with people who were already in a service and had been selected for that service because they had a certain amount of talent. There was no reason, for instance, why women working in the State Department, be it as a secretary or communicator or officer, could not continue to do so. They had been selected for that job because they could do that job. So they should not necessarily have had to give it up. But basically I had no choice in the matter. I was going to be out of the Foreign Service as long as my husband was overseas. They would not make me resign, but they would put me on leave without pay, and that's what happened. I went on leave without pay and became a spouse. My husband was the charg# at that point in Tehran.

*Q: This is Douglas Heck?*

HECK: This is Douglas Heck. So the first three months of my married life I was the wife of a charg#, and then we got an ambassador, and Doug reverted to being the deputy chief of mission. When I got to Tehran, which was a big embassy - in fact, it was the largest of our embassies in the Bureau of NEA, Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, at that point in the early '70s. It was our largest - I could not, of course, work at the embassy even if there had been a job available to me. But USIA, the United States Information Agency, offered

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me a position, and I accepted it, so for the next 18 months or two years I was on part-time reimbursable detail. In other words, I worked four hours a day, and I was paid by the State Department for this, but I was a Cultural Affairs Officer with the United States Information Agency in Iran. Later we found out that if we had done the right thing, we would have asked Washington for permission and Washington would have turned down permission for me to do this job. But having not asked - no one thought at the post that it was wrong, I had no connection with my husband's office, I had no connection with the embassy, we were located in a different part of town, and basically I did cultural things. I wrote cultural-type letters and took care of people who were going to the United States on visitors' grants of various sorts, and sat in on boards and selected them and took care of Americans who were visiting, and I enjoyed it very, very much.

*Q: This would be about '72 to '74?*

HECK: '72 to '74, yes.

*Q: What was sort of the political situation in Tehran or Iran in '72 to '74?*

HECK: Iran was at that point our best ally in the region, probably more so than Saudi Arabia, which would have been the next in line. The Shah, of course, was very secular in his outlook and very open to modernizing his country. I, as a spouse, who was working in the Cultural Section part time, I suppose, didn't see the fissures that were there and the problems that were just waiting to burst. The Shah, of course, had been asking for all sorts of military assistance from the United States for many years. He was very pleased when Richard Nixon came in to the Presidency here in the United States. He obviously felt, as did his government, that the Republican- (end of tape)Q: Ernie, you were talking about the Shah being pleased that the Nixon Administration was in, because you thought it would be more amenable to the Shah's desires than Democratic administration.

HECK: Well, this is indeed true and, in fact, Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon basically gave the Shah carte blanche to buy weapons. A major change in the country happened at

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about the time that my husband and I were leaving Iran, and that was the October war in 1973, the Yom Kippur War...

*Q: Between Israel and Egypt and Syria?*

HECK: Between Israel and Egypt and Syria, that's right. That war marked a turning point for the price of oil. The oil-producing nations in the Middle East, led in large part by the Iranians, had been pushing to raise the price of a barrel of oil, which at that point was about \$10.50, as I remember. The oil-using nations and the big oil companies had fought it tooth and nail, but the war in October changed all of that and suddenly prices of oil jumped for the first time, and they, I think, continued to rise. We left Iran in March of 1974, and even before we left, there was a huge foreign population in Iran, to the extent that the American Women's Club - this is just one measure of size - the American Women's Club had something like 500 members, and they met in the ballroom of the biggest hotel in town when they had a meeting. Lots more money came into Iran following the October Yom Kippur War of '73, and it was beginning to be shown. In fact, some of it had already been coming in and there were, even before we left, signs that things were not going so well in terms of American-Iranian relations. For instance, with all of these new weapons came the need to have training, training not only in using them but in maintaining them. Bell Helicopter, for instance, sent a large contingent of people that year, in '73, to maintain helicopters, and these were people who were sent to Isfahan south of Tehran, one of the major cultural and historical cities in the country...

*Q: Religious center too.*

HECK: A religious center also. The people who came were different from the previous people coming to the country as businesspeople in that they tended to be highly trained retiree noncoms from our military, and when they had been overseas as enlisted men, as noncoms, they had tended to be in many, many places there as singles. Their families were left back in the United States, certainly when they went to places like Vietnam but

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also to a number of the bases overseas. When they came to Isfahan for the first time, they were bringing their families. We had a tremendous problem with some of the families, specifically with the teenagers. It became a game among some of the kids, the boys, of these families, who were living in a sort of gated community outside of Isfahan, as I remember, on the outskirts anyway. These boys would ride around town on mopeds or mobilettes or motorcycles, whatever they were using, two-wheelers of some sort, and they'd play games with pulling the chador or the covering cloth off of women on the streets. Well, this is a very religious city. These are very conservative women, and this was akin in Iran of the early '70s to some man stripping a woman on the main streets of Washington, DC. Even though the lady had clothing on underneath this chador, it was something that should be left inviolate. It was a terrible things for the kids to do, and, of course, there were problems. There were problems between our communities. The embassy was always picking up the pieces. This is what consular officers, of course, have to do for a living. But it was a frightening thing. So the times were changing. We were increasing our presence there. Other countries were also. A lot of it had to do with this money. The last time I was in Iran - and it was very interesting - we left in March of '74 and we happened to pass through Iran in February or March, February I guess, of '75, eleven months later. We were on our way to a ceremony elsewhere, actually in Nepal, and it was a different city. The traffic had grown geometrically as opposed to arithmetically, the money that was available and that you would see on the streets in terms of ostentatious purchases and shops. The city of Tehran, at least, had always been a very rich city when we were there; at least portions of the city were very rich. I mean, I would go to ladies' teas at four in the afternoon, and all the Iranian ladies would be wearing emeralds the size of - well, very, very large ones. There was no way that people from the West could ever dress up to the standard of these women, because nobody from Europe or the United States had the sort of clothing and furs and jewelry and money to buy Parisian specials all the time that these ladies seemed to have. In fact, the only foreign ladies who ever seemed to be able to match them blow for blow were the women from South Asia who did have some of their wedding saris that were up to snuff in terms of matching the glitter. But it was even more

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so eleven months later, and I never saw it again, but you could see the sort of problems that were going to come to the country because of this great influx of money. Of course, there were many other problems that had nothing to do with money. The Shah put in technocrats to run all of his government, or as much of his government as he could. These technocrats tended to have Western educations. That put them out of the mainstream of the way things were in Iran. Iran was a country with tremendous talent, tremendous abilities, tremendous money, and it had an underclass or a poor class which didn't share much of this and certainly didn't share the values. The people that I knew socially tended, for instance, to be Western educated. It was amazing to go to a dinner. I remember sitting once at a roundtable of eight people, and a lady who was a Secretary of Education - not a minister but a high-ranking civil servant of education - was one of the eight people at the table, and the rest of us, the other seven of us, were all from other countries, and she spoke to each of us in our own language. It was just amazing. She spoke Greek, she spoke English, she spoke Russian, she spoke French - it just went on and on. Now, she was perhaps more so than most, but there was a great sophistication. There was also great sophistication among people like that who tended to have serial marriages as opposed to multiple marriages at once, but they certainly went through spouses and there was a constant reorganization of society as people married and divorced. That was not part of what the people from the bazaar and lower classes did. These people whom I saw socially didn't really pay much attention to things like fasting at Ramadan. They wouldn't eat on the street, but they would certainly eat privately. There were a number of people on the other side of the spectrum to whom this holiday or this religious observance of fasting between the hours of sunrise and sunset was of immense importance. The fact that these people were out eating and drinking during it didn't make them loved by that level of person. We of the United States should have seen this, aside from our political officers in the embassy who I know did see it. We had a Peace Corps there. Now, what was the Peace Corps doing in Iran? Well, it was providing the flautist for the orchestra in Tehran. It was providing city planners. These are things that you don't normally think of the Peace Corps as doing. And then it was teaching school. Now there were plenty of people

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in Tehran who could teach school. They didn't want to go out to the small villages. They didn't really have to. At that point Iran, with all this money and all of this ability to change things, had a literacy rate of about 35 percent. It was unacceptable, and it was certainly unacceptable that their own literates weren't doing the teaching, but others were. Later on it became the same sort of thing. Doctors - well, the doctors didn't want to go out there. There were plenty of Iranian doctors, lots of them in Europe and the United States. So where did they get the doctors? Iran brought them, as it were, from Korea, from India, from Pakistan, countries all that have large numbers of educated people willing to do this for hard currency. It was not a healthy situation, but I was largely oblivious to it at the time.

*Q: Ernie, we'll go to your work in the USA in a minute, but here you are, you've already come from a country where you were a political officer. You can't turn these genes off more or less. What were you getting from Doug and from others and from your own observance about how our embassy looked upon the Shah and what was happening? We're sticking from '72 to '74.*

HECK: I arrived in Iran just after Ambassador Douglas MacArthur III left. The political section in the embassy in Iran at that point during his tenure had an ongoing battle with the ambassador, with my husband very often trying to protect the junior officers and the political officers in general from the ambassador. He was a very strong and a very senior member of our Foreign Service.

We had consulates in Tabriz up in the Northwest, down in Khoramshar on the Persian Gulf near the Shat-al-Arab and the border with Iraq, and I'm trying to remember whether we still had one in Mashad or not, I think we closed Mashad. No, Shiraz and Isfahan at that point were both USIS posts, but not State, and they had language programs. Anyway, we had people in the provinces, and shades of Vietnam. These officers had trouble getting things through the embassy. Washington wasn't going to get the bad news, because the hierarchy wasn't going to let it happen. I know that this was one of my husband's major battles during his time as DCM there at that point. By the time I arrived, he was the charg#,



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as I said, for three months, and then we received a political appointee ambassador who was quite unusual in that he had been an appointee both of the Democrats and of the Republicans. He was on his final embassy at that point, coming out of Pakistan, and he paid very little attention to what the embassy was doing. I mean by that that things like this, political reporting, didn't factor into his life. He did the public issues and the socializing and so on.

*Q: This was Ambassador Newman?*

HECK: No, this was Ambassador Joseph Farland. He had been, I believe, in Panama and the Dominican Republic, and he had gone later, some years later, to Pakistan and then came to Iran. He was a friend of the President or at least he certainly fit in that category of big money donor and so on. He was there with us only perhaps eight months, although he had planned to have a longer period. He left under unusual circumstances, because, as I said, he did have, I think, the support of President Nixon, certainly of the Administration. But Mr. Nixon was eager to get rid of the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Richard Helms, and he apparently basically told Richard Helms he could have any overseas post that he wanted, in order to leave, and Mr. Helms, for a lot of professional as well as personal reasons, asked for Iran, and the President said yes. Well, of course, our poor political appointee was devastated, but I don't think it had anything to do with him personally. I think the President just had a greater need to get rid of a civil servant he wanted out of town. So Mr. Farland came in May just before President Nixon's visit that year, and he left in January, and that was one of the shorter tours. Immediately after he left, Richard Helms came, and so I had a couple of ambassadors and my husband had three in this post in a period of, for my husband, four years and for me two. Obviously Richard Helms had a great deal more interest in Iranian politics and what was happening in the country than did Mr. Farland. As far as I know, there wasn't the tension in the embassy or the resentment in the embassy that had been there before. I think that the officers who were there were able to pretty much get their reporting in the way they wanted, although I would have to defer to them on this. But it certainly didn't seem to have

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the unhappiness that had been there before. I think our junior officers in many cases did see what was happening, and I think our hierarchy in the embassy didn't for whatever reasons. This is something I never really talked to my husband about, and I wish I had been able to. I would like to know what his answers would be on something like this and where he stood. But, of course, everyone, I suppose, revises history as they get it behind them.

Q: *Oh, yes.*

HECK: I think it should have been apparent even in the mid-'70s, in '74, that this was a society which was in a somewhat dangerous situation and could indeed fall, as it did five years later.

Q: *There was a time - it probably was a little later - but essentially - at least this is the word I got - sort of a deal was made almost with the devil - I don't mean to make it pejorative - but a deal was made where the President passed the word down that we should on internal affairs rely on the Iranian sources, the Shahs and the Secret Police, Savak and all, and that we weren't to mess around domestically, which, of course, is what we're supposed to be doing. Had that happened yet?*

HECK: Yes, I think it had. I had heard that it had. Here again, I hate to comment on this in that it was sort of third hand. My husband didn't share a good deal of the really sensitive things with me obviously, but it's my impression that the President at the same time was saying basically that they could have anything they wanted to buy, that this dictate had been laid down. Certainly as a country we accepted an awful lot of what was told to us as gospel when we shouldn't have. I don't think that we didn't have people who knew, but I think that they were pretty much kept out of getting that word on to the top.

Q: *Were you getting any reflections? You're coming out of the sort of having been a young political officer and used to the give and take within those ranks in Vietnam. I think it would be hard to turn that off. Were you picking up anything about the CIA and what the CIA was*

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*doing as opposed to the rest of the embassy? Iran had a reputation of being sort of a CIA post in some places, or AID post.*

HECK: Well, yes, of course. I mean the CIA had been responsible for putting the Shah back on the throne after they got rid of a fairly elected, democratically elected government led by Mossadegh in the mid-'50s. That was 20 years on. The Shah had great gratitude and respect for the Agency, and he had close ties with the Agency that were not shared with the ambassador and the DCM, the standard line of how things went in the embassy, in any embassy. The Shah had come back into Iran at that point, brought in by the machinations, I guess you would say, of the CIA. They really pulled off quite a professional-looking coup d'etat and put the Shah back on the throne. At the time the Shah came back, he was a rather diffident young man, apparently who asked for and got a lot of advice from the CIA about how to do things, perhaps also from the earlier ambassadors on how to do things. I remember hearing stories of how the royal family would participate in functions at the embassy like a softball game occasionally. There were pictures, carefully put away by that point, but pictures of them doing just that. By the time I got there, and certainly by the late '60s, early '70s, the Shah was into his imperial mode. By the time I got there, he had already had the 250th anniversary of the ruling in Iran of royalty, a big ceremony at Persepolis in about 1971 with all the tents and all the world leaders coming to live in these fancy sort of Camelot-type tents with all the food flown in from Maxim's and the bedding from Europe and so on. Everything was from Europe. He was imperial. He was His Imperial Majesty when I got there. The embassy called him HIM, His Imperial Majesty, in terms of talk around the embassy, and he acted like an absolute monarch and an emperor. So things had changed dramatically in the 20 years since he had been brought back into power. So what I saw of Iran was all the imperialness, going to the palace, and the extraordinary things that were held there. When Naw-Ruz came every year - that's the Iranian 21st of March, the spring solstice, the big new year's date for Iran - the diplomatic corps would go there dressed in white ties and everybody would be given a gold coin with the face of the emperor and maybe two of them or one of them with

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the empress. We probably had 25 gold coins at one point given to us by either the Shah or the Shahbanu, the empress, for various occasions like that. They have disappeared over the years as jewelry has gotten stolen and so on, but there they were at one point. Everything was in superlatives at the palace. One didn't question the Shah, one spoke when spoken to, and all of the most rigorous of rules having to do with monarchy and imperial monarchy at that were in play by the time we got there. My husband had a special relationship of sorts with the Shah because he had gone to school with him for a year in Switzerland when they were both adolescents. The Shah's father had been a Cossack at the World War, First World War, and had seized power from the previous dynasty and went from being a rather crude colonel to being an emperor himself. He sent his oldest son to Switzerland for schooling, and the first year that the little boy went, he was about eleven, and he was sent, along with a couple of courtiers who while I was there were heads of very secret parts of the government of Iran, to a school called *École Nouvelle*, where my husband was enrolled. It was a rather spartan school of the sort where every little boy took a cold shower at five a.m. and went out to do calisthenics and so on. It didn't take long before all the little boys were picking on the poor little shah boy, whatever his title was at the time. I remember hearing stories about how in playing soccer - because he loved soccer but, of course, in his own country when he played soccer he always had the ball, nobody rubbed his nose in the dirt - he got lots of nose rubbing and dirt-type exercises. He lasted only a year there at that school and then was moved on to *Le Rosey*, a much tonier, fancier school with a little bit softer lives for the students. He never really talked about *École Nouvelle*. His official biography never mentioned it, but he had been there for a year. So Doug had known him then and came back at him to a different age and a different place. It gave a slight edge, I think, in talking to the man, but one didn't really volunteer anything to him as far as I know.

*Q: What had you picked up from other people about the rule of Douglas MacArthur and Mrs. MacArthur.*

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HECK: Douglas MacArthur had had five embassies, I think, five heads of missions jobs. Mrs. MacArthur was an extraordinary woman. She was the daughter of Alvin Barkley, who had been our Vice President under Mr. Truman and before that a very prominent Senator from Kentucky. She was imperial herself, and I frankly refused to marry my husband until I knew that she was away. I had heard of the MacArthurs long before I had any thought about getting married. In fact, when we were in Iran together, Stu, one of his previous DCMs, I think his DCM from Belgium, was there with us in CORDS as the senior person in CORDS, and I had a conversation with him one night where he told me horror stories about what it was like to be the DCM, or the wife of the DCM in the case of his wife, working for this couple in Belgium. So their history had gone ahead of them, had preceded them. She ran her meetings, the women's club, the embassy wives, that sort of thing, with a rather heavy hand. She served, for instance, coffee. All the wives came together in the big residence, and it was huge, and they were given coffee. Mrs. MacArthur had a woman who followed her, a servant of some sort, a lady's maid, with a tray of Veuve Clicquot champagne and a champagne glass, and Mrs. MacArthur drank champagne all morning, whereas all the other wives were relegated to coffee. It caused a certain amount of resentment among some of the wives who thought that that was a rather two-tier approach to running a wives' meeting. There were also some stories about wives being ordered to appear in costume at New Year's Eve functions and entertain. I mean by that where they would have some sort of gambling evening, a casino night type thing. The wives who could do it, who could carry it off, were expected to wear little costumes and do things like pass out the chips. It wasn't terribly embarrassing, but it was certainly not necessarily the way that any of us would like to spend our New Year's Eve. So things were hard. My direct predecessor, i.e., the wife of the previous deputy chief of mission before my husband arrived, was giving a luncheon one day, a formal luncheon, an entertainment type thing, representation entertainment, of a large table full of people, and the phone rang. The ambassador's wife demanded that she leave her luncheon guests at the luncheon table and go out and look for the ambassador's wife's cat which had gotten out of the residence. Both the DCM and the ambassador lived next to each other in a

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huge wooded compound. So, this poor woman with 24 guests or 18 guests had to walk out of her own party while they were eating and go out and look for the royal cat. This sort of story got around. The story I remember most: Iran was a place at that time with lots of entertainment. The ambassador, the DCM, the various officers of the embassy went to a lot of parties, a lot of dinners, lots of receptions, all sorts of things, and when the MacArthurs were ready to leave, there were apparently just lots and lots of functions in their honor among the Iranians and among the diplomatic community and so on. For the last month or so, my husband, who was then still single, was called home by the ambassador's wife every night after whatever party they had been at. Her husband would go upstairs to bed, and she wanted to reminisce and have another glass of champagne and talk about things, and one of the things she talked about rather obsessively for my husband's last month with her was that he as charg# when they left was not to use the ambassador's Cadillac, which was armored. He was to continue to use whatever the car was, the Chevrolet or whatever, that was assigned to him, but he was not under any circumstances to use the ambassadorial Cadillac. That was not his car to use. Of course, he sat there and he said he never got home until about two a.m. She liked to stay up late. He sat there and agreed with her, because he knew that the minute the plane took off he was going to be in charge and he could use any car he wanted, and it just was not worth the fight and certainly he didn't care whether he used the Cadillac or not, but it just got to a point where it began to grate on his nerves terribly that every night he was being told to leave the car alone. That was the sort of story I had heard earlier in Saigon.

*Q: How about the Helmses? What was your impression as a professional person of Helms? Having been the head of CIA and a real pro at CIA coming to the post, I was wondering whether this had put a different cast on things.*

HECK: I had nothing but the greatest respect for Mr. Helms. I think he is an extraordinarily competent servant of the people of this country and a man of great dignity and great honor. I don't know any of the specifics about who he had known in Iran before he came. He certainly had very good ties with everyone in government. He was discreet to the

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core. I never heard anything that indicated that he ever involved himself more than would be appropriate in anything that was going on. Certainly he knew what was going on. I assume that he knew a lot more about where the bodies were buried than anyone else in the mission. He was a very, very good ambassador, however, as was Mrs. Helms in a completely different way, a very intellectual woman who quickly became very interested in Iranian culture, archeology and so on, and has in fact written on these subjects, on art and the arts in Iran as well as anthropology and archeology type subjects.

*Q: What about the role of Savak? Were there people that you knew at all? Was this a concern? This is the Iranian secret police - more than secret police, it's sort of the Iranian arm of the Shah, wasn't it?*

HECK: It was a secret police with a vengeance, I suppose in large part like what Stalin had in the '30s in Russia, in the Soviet Union. It was a power unto itself. Everybody used the word Savak with fear. When you talked about Savak, always there was something bad attached to it. People were afraid of it. Iranians that we knew certainly never talked about it openly with me. They may have with my husband, but they danced around it very carefully, and there were lots of things that one didn't want Savak to know. Savak was perhaps like the military which was so powerful in Argentina in the same general period, when people disappeared and one could never really find out where your relatives had gone or what had happened to them or where their bodies might be buried. There was a good deal of that sort of thing with Savak. It was something that very much went bump in the night, and it was the boogie man for everyone most definitely.

*Q: Were you there during the Nixon visit?*

HECK: Yes indeed.

*Q: I'm told one Presidential visit is equivalent to three earthquakes.*



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HECK: I think it probably is, although they grow and grow and grow. This one, I think, had 182 people with him, and we were shocked at the numbers coming in. Now, of course, it's four times that or more, I suppose. So they do grow. First of all, the government of Iran wanted it to go well. They wanted everything to match the visit of President Eisenhower, who had come in the '50s. When President Eisenhower had come, the streets were lined with carpets, and he drove through a crowd of millions of people on these Persian carpets to the palace. It was an outpouring. Well, outpourings didn't happen in the Iran of the '70s, but the government wanted it to go very well indeed. They had us out at the airport. By us I mean everybody who was going to be in the motorcade, from the Iranian government - and that meant a lot - as well as from the embassy. We all had to be out to practice this at the airport, to practice the motorcade, to practice the landing, to practice all of this stuff, and when did we do this? We did this in the middle of the night so that for a couple of nights, three nights running, I think, we were out at the airport at two in the morning to practice doing the motorcade. Now I don't think that any other country has ever done that to American diplomats, but there we were driving into town in the motorcade in the middle of the night with all this stuff going, in order to make it work beautifully. The President arrived with his dentist, various hairdressers, as well as the press and various other people who go on these visits. He also brought with him, I think from the U.S. Navy, a chef or chefs and servers to do a luncheon for the Shah. The visit was marred by some bombs, nothing really serious, but there were, I think, maybe perhaps three incidents where bombs were thrown outside various USIS places, USIA offices, and it marred the departure. When the President and his entourage left to go to the airport at midday just after a luncheon to catch the flight - they were going next, I think, to Romania - they bypassed the center of the city. They had come through the normal way from the airport to the palace, in which they were staying, coming in, but going out they went on sort of a ring road, and there were people up on the sides of the ring road throwing things at the motorcade. A little damage was done. I don't think anyone was really hurt, but I think some windows may have been broken and some things. The Shah, of course, was absolutely livid, and I gather that some heads rolled on that, perhaps not really more than figuratively, but



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Savak had a certain role in rolling whatever happened with the demonstrations. There had been, of course, the standard banquet, the Shah offering the formal white-tie dinner for the President and the visitors, and it was the kind of thing that I had a number of while I was in Iran, white tie, very elegant, really basically French, and always five glasses at the table. You had your water glass. You had to have vodka with the caviar, and we always had caviar for the first course. One of the worst things that ever happened to me in Iran was I learned to love really good caviar, and I will never be able to afford that caviar again. We used to eat it by the scoopful. You could get it for like \$2.50 for 500 grams. It was just nothing. Anyway, the Shah always offered the kind that was only for the royal family, which is called golden caviar, actually not as good as the gray but very rare. So we always had the little shot glasses of vodka, which were often refilled, and then you had the white wine and then you had the red wine and you had to have the champagne and then there was water, of course, and so on. So you had this array of glasses and a very elegant dinner. The dinner was televised when President Nixon was there. The cameras, I'm told - we were at the dinner - swung up into the chandeliers every time a glass was raised and the sound was turned off so that the Iranians didn't have to watch their Shah drinking these various types of alcoholic beverage. So there was this huge dinner, and then the next day the President offered a luncheon, and it was either 18 or 24 and we were the cut-off point. My husband and I were the lowest ranking people there at the luncheon. Anyway, it was an absolutely magnificent lunch cooked by naval cooks and served by navy stewards in this palace. The table was arranged with the Shah across from the President and Mrs. Nixon across from the Shahbanu, the empress, in the middle of the table, and we all went down the table and, of course, my husband and I were way at the end. I think our Major General who was in charge of our Military Action Group, the MAG, was at the other end as the bottom, and in between there were all these various, the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister and the Court Minister, who was the equivalent of a prime minister but in the court system, etc. Delicious food, really strange conversation, because President Nixon was basically discussing with the Shah the horrendous aspects of the Communists and the awful things that they did and had done and probably would do in the future. I'm

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sure he believed this about socialist states. I'm sure that the Shah believed this also, so they were both preaching to the converted there, but we had to be quiet and listen to this. The President was using Henry Kissinger as sort of the cat's paw. "Isn't this right, Henry? Isn't this right, Henry?"

*Q: You mean Henry Kissinger?*

HECK: Henry Kissinger. Anyway, Henry Kissinger, and Henry Kissinger would then do the dog-and-pony show about the perfidiousness of whatever aspect of Communism we were talking about. He was really playing up to this. I thought to myself that I would expect that both of them had a little bit better grasp on reality in terms of what socialism meant to the world than what they were painting, which was a very simplistic sort of - it was the sort of communism that I think we heard of in the United States under McCarthy in the '50s. It didn't behoove the President of the United States to be believing that, and I hope to God that he was a little more sophisticated and I think he was in his interior acceptance or internalization of what the political situation was in the world. But it was very interesting to me at least to watch Henry Kissinger acting like the pet dog and filling in the blanks whenever the President wanted him to.

*Q: I take it that whatever it did cemented relations more of this particular group.*

HECK: The Shah, as I said, felt that the Republican administrations served him better and understood his predicament, his plight, better than the Democratic, and that may or may not be true. Certainly it was a lovefest between President Nixon and the Shah, partially, as you pointed out, because Nixon tended to allow him to do what he wanted within the confines of his own country and partially because we really needed him at that point. He was the voice of reason in the area. He did provide us with support in the Middle East, and he was a very important cornerstone of our foreign policy in the region.

*Q: Were you picking up any disquiet about the effects of the Shah's white revolution?*

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HECK: Well, yes, because it was moving perhaps faster than some of the more conservative members of society would have wanted it to. What his white revolution was doing was, in effect, what we would have liked to have seen done in Iran: more justice, more education, better water and electricity and other support for people living in the countryside. All of these things the United States, that most Americans, would say are good things to have. It was obvious that he was pulling a somewhat recalcitrant, traditional population behind him. By that I mean what were called in Iran, and are called today, I suppose, the bazaarees, the small businessmen in the bazaar, the peasants and so on. The one part that I didn't get a feel for, because it was almost nonexistent there in public view, was the power of the religious element, the mullahs. The Ayatollah Khomeini was in exile in those days living in Iraq, as were a number of other religious leaders. There were government rulers who gave the appropriate blessings at departure and arrival of the Shah and that sort of thing when he left the country, and I never really realized what was going on religiously. There were tapes even then being passed around very surreptitiously from these mullahs and others in exile.

*Q: You're talking about audiocassettes?*

HECK: Audiocassette tapes, yes, but sermons given in Iraq were being passed from hand to hand even then, and people were very careful about it. I didn't know about them, although there again, if I had been in the embassy, perhaps I would have, but in my role in life then, which was to be a spouse and to be in charge of a lot of entertainment and to run a hotel, I didn't in fact see it in my personal life, but apparently it was there.

*Q: What about concerns about corruption? I understand from reports that as the white revolution went on and money started coming in, the royal family and all the cousins and aunts and all got very much involved in being middle people or running things. Did that appear on your radar at all?*

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HECK: Yes, of course, and it wasn't just the royal family. Iran was run by a bunch of people who were what we call five percenters. If you wanted to sell Boeing Aircraft to the airline or military airplanes to the military or whatever the military equipment was, the firms would get a local citizen, who would then rake off his commission, and five percent was probably less than what a lot of them were taking, but there was a lot of money to be made, and a lot of people had it. There were tremendous stories of corruption among certain members of the royal family, whereas other members of the royal family were seen to be quite innocent of that sort of thing. Of course, Princess Ashraf, the Shaw's twin sister, was the butt of a lot of gossip about this sort of thing. I suspect that a lot of it was true. She was also the butt of a lot of gossip about her sexual proclivities, needs, demands. Probably a lot of that was true. There was a good deal of all sorts of things going on under the surface of this society. Opium was another one. I can remember parties where, if you stayed too late, the hard core got out the opium, and that's when we always left, but it was there. Drugs were there, all sorts of money and sex, all the various things which are tied into corruption, yes, very much so. Tremendous wealth to be made and plenty to share.

*Q: I would have thought that this would cause disquiet in the embassy, because, you know, when all is said and done, America is a relatively puritanical society. Did this, sort of putting these two together, cause problems?*

HECK: I'm sure it did, Stu. I think, though, that that's something you need to talk to people who are actually posted there. You have to remember that I was at this point in a very special part of my life. I had just gotten married. I was suddenly in charge of a tremendous establishment. I left Washington having lived in a small one-bedroom apartment, living on my carton of cottage cheese and my hamburger, and then suddenly I was running a house with seven adults living in it and servants and giving tremendous parties. I spent so much time just concentrating on doing that correctly and successfully that I probably missed a great deal of what was actually happened.

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*Q: ...about your work with USIA.*

HECK: Well, I count myself very lucky to have been given this opportunity, because otherwise I really probably would have gone bats. It was a very useful thing to me to have a four-hour-a-day job to which I could go and sort of decompress from having had my own career to being the spouse in a rather large organization. So I had my own little four-hour period there when I could do my cultural stuff and write my letters and discuss things like Eisenhower Fellowships and Humphrey Fellowships and international visitors' programs and get out of the constant spotlight that I was in as the wife of a senior officer in a big embassy. Basically, I think, I was the fourth of four in the Cultural Section, so I got what was left over, which I had had a great deal of experience in, having done that in Saigon in the Political Section. Q: Were you involved with Iranian students? Iranian students became, probably more than in any other country, the expatriate students became a factor in what happened later. I was consul general in Athens at this time, and Iranian students were, again using diplomatic terms, a pain in the ass all over the place, with Iranians trying to get to the United States, often not to very good schools but just to go there. They weren't a very impressive crew.

HECK: Well, there were some very impressive ones. They just weren't the visa problems and the problems that came up. First of all, you had the very rich, and their children went to the United States to study with no problems whatsoever, and they went to the very good schools. Then you had this whole new rich who wanted to send their kids there, who might not have had the background, who were your problems and were the problems for our Consular Section in Iran. There were all of the problems you would expect, people trying to cheat, falsify documents, things under the table being offered to get the student to wherever he was going. So, yes, there was something of a dichotomy in our student populace. The part that I saw more was the student who came through our Iran-America Society, which was a huge operation in Iran and operated under the aegis of but separate from the U.S. Information Agency. It had a huge physical plant, and it offered English

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classes to students, perhaps five or six thousand of them in several places around Tehran. The students who came through that program, learning English preparatory to going to the United States, then constituted the problems I suppose that you got later on in Athens and elsewhere. The very best who went to the United States were very good indeed. They had good backgrounds. There were three English-speaking, American-oriented, international schools in Iran open to Iranians in some cases as well as foreigners, and the kids who came out of that process and then went on to Stanford or MIT or wherever they went were really good students and perfectly capable and had the money behind them usually. So it really was, as I said, a dichotomy. We also sent to the United States - and this was the sad part, I suppose - lots of doctors. I used to get involved in giving the test that doctors have to take in order to come to the United States to practice. They had to have all their medical records and so on, but they also had to have this long English test and so on, and I would get involved in the English test for them. Thousands would take this exam. It would be like 1,800 a test or something who would take the exam and who ended up working on Fifth Avenue and other places in the United States, while Iran hired doctors from India and South Korea to fill the slots that were open in their own country - very strange situation. But the worst of the student problem hadn't hit us yet in 1974 when we left. I gather that it got worse and worse up till the time of the revolution when then the students in the United States who had helped to bring down the Shah by demonstrating here in the United States against him when he came to visit then began to demonstrate in the streets as the revolution swept over Iran in '79, perhaps culminating in the hostage taking of our embassy and concurrent demonstrations by Iranians here in the United States, Iranian students.

*Q: It didn't go over very well.*

HECK: It did not go over very well, and wouldn't.

*Q: I recall I was in Naples then, and they were asking if Naples could be a place for Iranian students to come and sort of adjust their sadas, and I said, "Hell, no." There was no*

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*sympathy for the Iranians. Ernie, can you comment, before we quit this session, on your feeling about the role of women that you observed there.*

HECK: In Iran?

*Q: In Iran, yes, from the cultural field and particularly getting away from this upper class.*

HECK: Well, we can't get away from this upper class. I mean, the role of women in the mid-'70s in Iran very much correlated with the role of that particular family in the society. There were families which were quite modern and quite sophisticated and allowed their women roles in public. There were women in all the ministries. There were women in high-ranking government jobs. There was even at least one woman who was a minister at that time. Women who wore the chador, which is, as I said, the Iranian equivalent of a burqa although it's really more a sheet that is wrapped around to cover a person instead of a garment under which you climb in order to get into it. The women of middle class in Tehran, upper middle class in Tehran, and higher did not wear this at all unless they were perhaps going into a special religious shrine like the shrine in Mashed or the shrine in Gom where holy men had been buried or whatever. Otherwise, they never wore it. They were out in public, they drove cars, they did all the things that women do in any country in the West. They were doctors, not perhaps a tremendous number but there were doctors and lawyers and dentists and all sorts of things. And then one had the lower middle class and lower. We had a woman working in the house. She had been deserted by her husband who had run off with another woman. I think he was a policeman. In any case, she was left with nothing. She had no children, no money. She could have starved to death. She got a job working in our house, and had been working there for years, as a laundry woman. She came every day and did whatever had to be done in terms of the laundry. She didn't take any garbage from the male servants, who sort of circled around her. She was a tough little lady, and she wasn't going to accept it when they got uppity, so they basically gave her respect. In 1974 she was invited to come to the United States, and she came as a tourist, this little laundry woman. Her nephew worked here at the Smithsonian, I think. Anyway,

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he worked in the greater Washington area. I don't know what he did, but he basically told her - and she came to work every day with a chador on, and she put it on when she went home - he told her if she ever wore a chador again, he would disown her. She came back absolutely convinced in 1973 that this was the wave of the future. She gave up the chador, a very brave thing to do considering where she lived, because in her own little neighborhood one was expected to wear this. She came back from the United States with her hair done, her nails painted red, and she wouldn't wear the chador. She was just so proud of herself because she was a modern woman. I've often thought about Banu - she was called Lady and not by her name - but I've often wondered what happened to her when the revolution came because, of course, she would have had to go back immediately to the other side. But there was this sort of a dichotomy. The society she came from did this, and the other society, the higher-on-the-social-scale society, didn't, and there was a real chasm there, which has been papered over by what has happened since then. Like, I suppose, many places in the world, the fight against things like wearing the chador had started in the very upper classes. There was a lovely old lady called Princess Peruz, who had been one of the leaders of this in the '20s, I guess, fighting against wearing the chador, but she was married to a prince of the previous dynasty. She was the sort of person who would have been a labor leader in the '30s in the United States, and she was out there on the hustings and walking in the front of a parade and so on, but it was people from that class that fought against it, the liberals from the upper classes rather than people down the line who fought against any of the social injustices. The thing that bothered me most about the situation of women in Iran - I suppose because I saw it happen so often to people from my own country as well, and I gather that this is a function of Islam in many of the more traditional parts of the world, certainly in Afghanistan, upon which I spent a good deal of my career later - and that was that a woman was never her own. She always belonged to the men in her life. So a woman had to have written permission to travel, if she was leaving the country, from her father. If she were married, it had to come from her husband. If she were a widow, it had to come from her son, and if there were no sons, then from the nearest male relative in the family. But there always had to



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be a written permission for her to get her passport and leave the country, in fact, if that was what she was going to do. We had lots of American wives of Iranians there, and it was the same thing for them. They had to have written permission. Well, there were some real horror stories, and as a consular officer you can appreciate the problems that this would give us, we as Americans, because these women couldn't go home to visit their families if their husbands didn't want them to. They couldn't take their children out unless their husbands gave written permission for the children to go, etc., or the other men in the family hierarchy, which meant that a woman in trouble was a prisoner. We had lots of prisoners, because inevitably in a number of marriages like that, there are some which perhaps shouldn't have happened, when the men who came home either reverted to what they had been before they went off to wherever to study or however they had gone to the United States and who caused great problems. I think that the saddest stories that we heard as an embassy had to do with women who had married either policemen or Iranian noncommissioned officers or enlisted men in their military, who had gone over to the United States for short-term training programs of various sorts, who went to bases, say, in Texas or somewhere and were there for four months or six months and picked up a bride in the process - nice looking men, really nice looking men, and I can see how it might happen. Then these women would come back to Iran, and they would be out in the middle of nowhere living in conditions that they would never have lived in in the United States, and they were prisoners. It was very, very sad in some cases. That continues to this day, of course, with the new government as well as the old. It happens in Afghanistan, as I said, and probably in other Islamic countries as part of a culture which is hard - it's not the religion but the culture which is hard for us to accept.

*Q: Well, Ernie, why don't we stop at this point and pick it up next time when you leave Iran in 1974?*

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Today is the 12th of January 1998. Ernie, 1974, in the first place just to give a little continuity to it, where did you meet Doug?

HECK: Well, I actually met in him 1964 when he was the political counselor and he came down to Bombay, where I was working at the time, and I was the factotum for the consul general. He came down to take Jane Abel, who is now Jane Abel Coon, off to Goa. It was the first time the Americans had visited had visited Goa after the take-over by the Indian government in Portugal. I actually had 15 minutes of conversation with him in the outer office, so that doesn't really count. When I actually got to know him was at the time that I had come back from India in 1968. I was assigned to that office for four or five months until the junior officer course started, and I was actually attached to Carol Bunker, Carol Laise Bunker and was her good right hand, I guess, for about four months. I didn't think of it again until the winter of '69 when I was working in INR on South Vietnam, and I suddenly got an offer to be sent off to South Asia, actually to Afghanistan. Robert Newman, then the ambassador, wanted a woman. He didn't care what she was doing. He wanted a woman as something that was professional, and I was offered the job by the South Asian people. Well, the junior officer people heard this, and they immediately turned it off. Of course, the junior officer office controls junior officers for the first two years, and I went downstairs to see the junior officer people a day later or two days later and got this awful explanation which was that I had been in South Asia and, since all of South Asia and Africa were the same anyway, they thought that they would send me and they had already assigned me to go to Rio to be a consular officer. Now I had classmates who would kill for that job, but it wasn't me. I went back upstairs to INR complaining. My boss, who was then Dick Smizer, working on North Vietnam - and basically what I was doing was working out in days what the North Vietnamese were doing in the peace talks - he said, "The one way you can get out of this is to go to Vietnam. How would you like to go to Vietnam?" I said, "Fine, anything that will make me (a) a political officer and (b) get me back to Asia," and so that's how I got to Vietnam. Well, to go back one step further, I had, in the same time of talking to Dick Smizer, also written to Doug Heck, who had been my boss on the South

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Asian desk, who was then off in Istanbul. By the time his answer got to me, my problem had long been solved, but I had made the connection and that's where it came from. Then in the meantime one thing led to another, and four years later we were married.

*Q: You were going where in '74 then?*

HECK: In '74 he had just been assigned as the ambassador to Niger, and in the typical Foreign Service way of the early '70s, they didn't even tell him where he was going. He had a phone call on Thanksgiving morning our time, so Thanksgiving evening Washington time or whatever, the then Director General of the Foreign Service asked if he would go to Niger. He said yes. That was in late November. In late January it was announced publicly that he was going to Niger, so that's how he heard about it. When I think about it today, I think that's really a terrible way to handle an appointment. But anyway so there we were and we were going to go to Niger. We left Tehran in March of 1974 with a lot of people making really horrendous racist comments about going to the dark continent. The Iranians were not exactly nonracist.

*Q: This was from the Iranian side?*

HECK: Oh, yes, all from the Iranians, and we went through at least a month, maybe six weeks, of daily lunches and dinners. There were farewell parties everywhere, but it was interesting in sort of an odd way to try to decide what they thought about it, because they were all so embarrassed about it. They couldn't congratulate us. "My God, he's going to Africa." But they could certainly feel it, and so we had a lot of caveats but not a lot of good memories from that.

*Q: This was the era when everybody was competing, you know, the African leaders. Had the Iranians made any efforts to reach out as the Soviets had and everyone else to get African students at the universities and all that?*

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HECK: Not quite then, Stu, a little later perhaps. They were into the big time in the '74-'75 period. Late '73 was when the major war came for Israel, and that was the Yom Kippur War. The price of oil, which the Shah had been fighting tremendously for getting it raised, was \$10.50 a barrel then. He got nowhere until the Yom Kippur War, and then all of a sudden the price of oil just shot up, and you remember what that did in the United States. Well, what it did in Iran, of course, was make an already more or less rich country really rich, and they could just spread this money out any way they wanted. It was a very short period. It was about four and a half years and then, of course, the whole country went comatose, but in that one four-and-a-half- or five-year period they were really going to town.

*Q: Was there any feeling that you got from your contact and Doug's contacts that the Iranians had any sort of social interest in helping their neighbors?*

HECK: No, not at all. There was a completely different base between the upper and the lower middle classes in Iran, and I don't think I noticed it. I feel that a lot of it had to do with the fact that I was very newly married and I was very much into other things. I wasn't being the political officer; I was being the wife, and I didn't see this, but it was tremendous. So you would have on one hand the annual period of fasting that comes every year in Islam. Nobody I knew did it. All they did was sort of hide behind the doors. They could eat anything they wanted whenever they wanted. They just didn't do it in public. Did I notice it? No, I didn't. So when we left, we left behind a lot of people who had been part of a very rich lifestyle, a number of whom either were executed or escaped in the late '70s. The ones I always thought about were the poor. The stories that I remember are much more tearful than perhaps some of the those of the rich people who were just sort of nutty.

*Q: Well, turning to Niger, you were there from when to when?*

HECK: We were there from '74 to '76, and this was the period - as a matter of fact, when we left Washington to go to Niger, because there was this small period in between - the

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government fell. For the first time there was a coup, which is not such an unusual thing in Africa, but the first time in Niger. The man who had been the president was arrested and was under house arrest for the full time that we were there. The State Department in early '74 had not worked out yet how they had coups, which are not all the unusual in many parts of the world where we go, so they held Doug for about six weeks in France. He happened to get as far as France - what a pity, huh? So he was in Paris while the State Department tried to figure this out, and finally Henry Kissinger decided that we would recognize countries and not governments, so, all right, he could go. So we got there finally at the end of May of 1974. The man who had led the coup, who was a colonel named Kountche, was a very moral, almost Calvinistic, man, and he was probably very good for the country. I did not know Hamani Diori, who was the president before him, who was, as I said, under house arrest for the whole time we were there, but I think that Colonel Kountche, as far as leaders went, was a very good leader for that country at that time.

The problem for Niger in the mid-'70s was that it was, in 1974, in the seventh year of a very bad drought. There were refugee camps everywhere, all the way from Senegal to Chad. Animals had to be killed because nobody could support them, nobody could feed them. People were starving. It was not a good time. As far as Kountche went, he was a good leader, and that sort of Calvinistic streak in him was probably a good thing. Now in the two years that we were there, we had at least one other major coup where some of his people rose against Kountche. It was the first time I had heard close-in shooting. You and I were in Vietnam together, but when something went bang, it was our something that went bang. It was in the sky and it was ours. All of a sudden there was all this bang-bang stuff in the streets and it wasn't ours. The awful thing was, the man who pulled off the coup, whom I liked and who later was killed in the coup, executed in the coup, did a very stupid thing. Whether he was right or wrong with the coup, I would not be in a position to judge since I was a spouse, but he got tickled by the toys. When he started this coup, the first thing that got to him was the fact that there were Mercedes and he could drive around in these Mercedes and act important, and he did this. Well, the coup came in to haunt him,

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right? He was dead meat. But as far as Niger went, when we first got there, the drought was terrible. People were allowed to buy two eggs a week. I remember this specifically because we had an aid family who had seven children. Well, you can imagine what two eggs a week do to a family with seven kids. I can work around this, but it was hard. We were in a situation which was very primitive if you were coming from Tehran, for instance. I remember writing a letter to the DCM's wife and asking about things like champagne and what I should order. Then when I got there I realized I had been living in this society which was terribly, terribly elegant, fake maybe, but elegant, and then I went off to Niger. So whether I had a case of champagne or not was probably of very little interest when you were in a place where you could only buy two eggs a week. But it got worse. It was a very poor place. The people were sweet, and I mean that sincerely, but there was not much market for sweet black Africans in 1974. They were being run over by the neighboring countries.

*Q: Before you went there, was there any preparation for being an ambassador's wife for Niger?*

HECK: Not coming from overseas. Perhaps there was in Washington, because there had been this course which was offered, and I have no idea, but coming out of where I did, no, there was no course at all. And, like I said, it was so different. I had served overseas individually in Bombay and Saigon, and then I had Tehran. Now all of these were very big cities and very sophisticated cities, and I went to this place which was officially 50,000 people. It had one stoplight. I had not even realized I had been through the town when I went through the town when I arrived. The airport was here, the town was in between, and the embassy, American embassy and residence, were on the other side of a long, narrow strip of semi-built-up area, and I really did not know that I had been through town. So it was a big difference. Now I had come from a very small town background.

*Q: I was going to say, did this take you back?*

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HECK: I'm not sure what it took me back to, but it was a far cry from what I had as an adult in the Foreign Service. My predecessor had been - I mean my ambassador, the predecessor of Doug - had been the DCM, before he went to Niger, in Athens, and his entire career had been in Europe. It was probably much more of a shock for him than for us, who had basically spent most of our time in the third world. But the woman who had been the ambassador's wife ahead of me had made a thing of taking the wives, if they came to a social event, into a small den next to the living room and they played children's games. This was how she entertained them, because she had no way of talking to them. I determined I wasn't going to do that. Obviously our backgrounds were different, but this was not going to be my way of doing things. So we made a big effort to entertain together and to have people come in together and give the women as well as the men something to deal with. I think probably the nicest thing that happened in the whole two years was about a year after we had been and we gave a dance. We hired a band, and we had a dance outside, and the men started to come with their wives, plural. Always before, there would be a wife who (a) spoke French and (b) was the public wife. She would be the one who would be - she was usually the youngest and usually, well, the best educated but also the most Frenchified, you might say, Francophone, and she would come as the wife. You knew that you had really made it, because they no longer treated you like you were absolutely from outside. They began to trust you enough to consider that you might allow the whole family to come, and that was a very nice thing.

*Q: Well, now, is Niger almost completely a Muslim country?*

HECK: Well, sort of. The Saudi ambassador didn't think it was Muslim at all, and he would tell you at great length why these people just didn't understand what the religion meant, and maybe he was right. Yes, officially, the country was Muslim. All of the accoutrements of being Muslim pertain to this country. Whether these people really understood what Islam was in the sense of what the more conservative Muslims might have thought, I don't know. They didn't seem to think so. Basically it was a country that had been - Niger had

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not really been colonized until very late in the European influx in Africa, and these people had not become Muslims until very late into the Islamic influence into Africa. The area around Niamey, the capital, had not even been a capital, had not even been a solid city until the late '20s, so we're talking about a very non-educated or new society. When we were there in the mid-'70s, most of government was run either by French - in fact, at one point the Corsican who had been in charge of the secret service was being fired, and he came to our house before he left and he said he just wanted us to know that they had had to give up on us because we spoke too much English on the telephone and they hadn't been able to do our telephone calls, they hadn't been able to translate everything. So you had on one hand the French, who were doing things, and on the other hand you had a lot of people from the coast, from Ghana and Benath, which was Dahomey at that point, and Toto, some Nigerians who had come up and were actually running things. But you had the English-speaking coastal people and you had the French-speaking. It was an interesting juxtaposition.

*Q: What about the role of women there? You say there are multiple wives, but were they following Islamic tradition? Were the women secluded and that sort of thing?*

HECK: Well, the people who could afford to have more than one wife tended to be businessmen or captains or above in the military, and they tried to keep the system. I'm not quite sure what the word is, Stu, but anyway, that each wife gets the same treatment. Each one has a house, each one has a little garden of her own, and the man is supposed to move from one to the other in a fair and equitable division of his time. Whether it's true or not, I don't know, but we had two daily new programs on radio - there was no television, of course, in those days in Niger - and there was a daily newspaper which was what we would call a tabloid. I would use this. You know, I'm having to entertain all the women. I found this very difficult, because I wasn't particularly interested in clothes and jewelry and kids. Those were the only things that most of them could talk about. So I would say at a dinner party where they would come, "I just read in the Fahel, the newspaper, that your husband, the minister of dah-dah-dah, has been on a tour in eastern Niger and he's gone



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to X Y Z,” and they wouldn't know, because if it wasn't his night to be at their compounds, they didn't know where he was and they didn't even care. It was the hardest job I've ever done in my life, Stu, and you've known me for enough years to know I'm just not much at talking about jewelry and kids. And I couldn't get any conversations going. It was hard, it was very hard.

*Q: Did you try astrology? I've often found that I'm stuck with somebody and I know nothing about astrology, but when worse comes to worst, you'd say, “Well, what sign were you born under?” - and I'm talking about sophisticated ladies.*

HECK: No, I didn't. Perhaps I should. I had a job while I was out there. I bought books and - I can't even remember what the organization was called back in the United States, but they wanted to have written records of countries all over the world. So anything that was printed in Niger, I could buy and sell to - it was not the Smithsonian, but it was something, a serious organization. And I would go around and occasionally I would see some of these wives, because a few of them were in fact clerks in various stores. I had a particularly close friend. It was very sad. I remember us having conversations at dinner parties. We had a dining room that held 24, and at one point, perhaps the noisiest dinner that we ever had, my husband made the mistake of asking something about having multiple wives, and there was a wife there who was married to a senior civil servant but not a minister, who burst into a real melancholy mood and it really tore the dinner party apart. But anyway down the street lived a captain who was a minister in the government, an army captain who was a minister in the government. His wife and I became friends, mainly, I guess, because she discovered that I had lived in India and I liked hot food, I liked spices. So she would appear every once in a while with a little jar of something she had concocted which was made out of hot chilis or something. She was divorced from her husband at that point. She had been divorced four times from him. She was the mother of his oldest male child. Therefore, that gave her a special role. He had a very roving eye, and he also was very careful about the Muslim - you know, you can only have four spouses, so he would divorce her and then he would marry her back when he got rid of one of the other

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three. He always would go back to her because she was the spouse who had produced the first son and, therefore, she had a role in life. Big deal. I mean, this woman, her life was like a yo-yo. She was being torn apart by this. It was particularly hard for me to listen to her as another woman, because without really understanding, I could understand that interpersonal relationships can be really terrible. I have no idea what has happened to her in the next 20 years, if she has been divorced. But Bulama Manga is still going, and he's around there somewhere and he's now into his sixties and maybe he's trying to slow down.

*Q: Well, what were American interests, as you all thought of in Niger during this '74 to '76 period?*

HECK: None. American interests in Africa had begun at the time of independence for a lot of Africans, about 1960, and it was to have a presence everywhere. American interests in Niger were zip. A little bit later uranium was discovered. Maybe you could make a case for that. There was a period when they were searching for oil in the region, and maybe you could make a case for that. But basically, no, we had no business, we had no interest, but we were everywhere in Africa in the early '70s, every single capital no matter how small, whereas perhaps the British were smarter. They would have a regional ambassador based in a place like Lagos or a major capital on the coast, and he would then be responsible for six or eight countries. Maybe that made more sense. I've never quite understood it. We had an embassy of nine Americans. There were four times that, five times that, in USAID, but that was when USAID was big and we could afford to be generous in a way that perhaps would be impossible now. We had one person with what today is the USIS, USIA - it was then. In any case, we didn't need to be there. We were there in a way - we sat up on a hill overlooking the Niger, the river. We had six acres on one side of the street, which was the embassy, and six acres on the other side of the street, which was the residence. I had enough fruit and vegetables, I kept the entire American community in Niger going with food. Beside that, we had a nine-hole golf course that we built on the six-acre compound across the street, and we had nothing to do there. It was a mistake. I really

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think that the United States did not have to be everywhere in the world. This was 23 years before we're speaking, and we certainly didn't need to be there then, but we were.

*Q: What about dealing with the wives of AID and the Embassy? Did you find a role there?*

HECK: One of my roles, believe it or not - you'd get a kick out of this - was to interpret. If you didn't speak French in Niger, you didn't survive. We had lots of wives who didn't speak French, and I used to do things like take AID wives and their sick dogs to the vet to translate about what was wrong with the dog. I remember that particularly because AID then had - this was 20-some years ago, and we had to quit earlier, but AID people could go on to 65 - so this man was 64 and his wife was five years older, so she was pushing 70 and she didn't speak a word of French. The one thing that mattered to her wasn't her husband; it was this poor little sausage of a dog, and the dog was getting old and he was geriatric and he had problems. I thought to myself, have I come to this? I'm going around the world talking to vets about AID dogs? It made me think about my role in the Foreign Service. But it was a very useful thing, and we had a very close community, as you would expect in a group that small. You either had to survive together or fall apart, so in terms of a working relationship, I think it was probably the closest working relationship that I've ever had in a community, because it was a small one. We all knew that, and we worked very hard at it.

*Q: Was there concern about Qadhafi up in Libya? I notice there is a border that looks like it's probably the most desolate part of Africa or something like that, but there is a border.* HECK: *There is a border, and it is desolate and, yes, Qadhafi was a real problem. The only real threat that the government of Niger had in the two years we were there was from Libya. It was because they had money and Niger didn't.*

They started in maybe '73 by trying to influence the government of Niger by giving them Motts and Koran, and this was something, of course, the Nejaham could not refuse. It was politically correct and every other way correct, but it was frightening. The government of

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Niger, (certainly Colonel Qadhafi - who, by the way, never changed his rank unlike most military types around government who took over governments, and he did not become a field marshall overnight; he did later get promoted, but it was in the course of things, and he would have gotten promoted anyway) - was concerned about Libya. Libya had all the money, so it was a very dicey sort of proposition for him. While we were there, the Libyans at one point smuggled weapons into the country in the diplomatic pouches. They caused problems that way. It was always something that Niger was concerned about but unable to do much. To the best of my knowledge, they never really ruined anything, but, yes, they were concerned. While we were there, they did put in all this money for the new mosque and they built up a lot of stuff. They were scary, and there was not much Niger could do about it - a small country. Niger at that time had - it's a large area physically, a huge area, but it had four million people and it had no money, and what do four million people and no money do in the middle of western Africa. So, yes, Libya was a scary thing. The Nigerians were black, but they were Islamic. That made them right there a border country. They were very unlucky. I don't know how else to explain it. When we left, it looked as if they were going to get very rich, because the thing about uranium had just happened. Well, it didn't work. The need for uranium worldwide went down, so twenty years on it's still a poor country. They never really discovered the real big oil. The uranium sort of went bust, because it didn't matter anymore, and there they are. In the Sahara the desert has moved 100 miles south from when we were there. I mean by that, the photographs taken from satellites will show that the real Sahara has moved south at least 100 miles, and even the very richest parts of a country like that are so pathetically borderline. There's just not much.

*Q: Was the "Soviet" threat a problem?*

HECK: I suspect the Soviets thought of it as the farthest reaches to send people. We had an ambassador, a Soviet ambassador, lovely man, who had spent, as far as I could tell, his entire adult life in west Africa, and he was going nowhere in a hurry. If we had somehow increased our representation, yes, perhaps they would have. One of the funniest

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stories I can remember from my time there: My husband would get trips back to the United States for various reasons. The U.S. government would pay to send him home. He had gone home at one point, and I don't remember specifically why, but anyway he was on one of those trips back to the United States, and because there was never money for the spouse, the spouse stayed. About five in the morning there was a knock on my door in this big house with this six-acre compound. It was one of the guards. There had been a man at my gate since two a.m. who had wanted to come in, and they had decided not to disturb me until more or less daylight. It was a communications clerk from the Soviet embassy who wanted to defect. Now I was by myself, and this Soviet didn't speak French or English and I didn't speak Russian. It was a very interesting conversation. I knew from listening to my husband that there was a code that you were supposed to use, and it was the name of somebody. I knew what I was supposed to do. I was supposed to, in this case since Doug was not home, call the DCM, the charg#, and say to him Mr. Woop is there to see him, and he would then come over. Now this was after I had already heard from the Corsicans that they weren't really listening to our phones anymore because they couldn't understand us, but I had to rack through my brain and I finally thought of the name, which was a long Russian name, and I called up the then charg#, who later became ambassador there, named Jack Davison. I said to him that Mr. So-and-So was there to see him. Jack did come over and rescue me from having to decide what to do with this poor schmuck who had been outside the door for four hours at that point on what amounted to a dirt road leading to nowhere. The house and the embassy were across the street, and then it went out to a little restaurant and that was it. There was nothing out there, so how he had ever hid - maybe no one came by, I don't know. That was my one experience with the Soviets. The agents came in, the CIA, which was not located there, and they smuggled him out of the country. For all I know, he became the best intelligence person they ever had. I do not know. They never told me. But it all had to do with the fact that the ambassador was having an affair with his wife, and this was how he was going to get even with the wife. The ambassador was our friend, but I never knew the wife. Interesting story.

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*Q: Oh, yes. Well, you left there in '76?*

HECK: We left in '76. We left shortly after the national day which was, of course, our bicentennial, which was a very big thing. In our community we had put a whole year into working on that bicentennial. We had the Peace Corps lined up to shoot off fireworks, and all the spouses were involved in making the food. We had invited, we had about 800 people including the president. We had borrowed Marine security guards, which we did not have, from one of the coastal embassies, to send some up for us so that we could have all the pomp and circumstance. It was a very nice party, but the awful thing was the guest list of almost 800. The party was to be six to eight or seven to nine, I've forgotten. At about two o'clock we had a phone call from the president's office telling us to postpone it because somebody was on a plane and on a refueling stop and he was going to have to go out to the airport. He wanted to come to the party. He wanted the party changed to the next day. Have you ever tried to turn off a party for 750 people? It was very interesting. We basically laid hors d'oeuvres all over the house, covered them with wet towels, and prayed, and it worked. Even though there was not much of a system in town, we were able to reach almost everybody by phone. We had a junior officer out turning people away, but he only got like nine or ten couples. We were able to do it, but I thought to myself, if I had to postpone a party this big for 24 hours, I can do anything. There is very little left in life that is not possible.

Anyway we left in the summer of '76 after that big blast and came back to Washington. I went back to work in the State Department. Now, those people who work in the State Department know that you have to have your security check-up graded occasionally. Of course, we were sent home at a very late date. I don't know when they knew about Doug, but by the time I had heard about it, the assignment process for middle-grade officers was long over. So I was assigned to the INR, the intelligence and research section, to the office which is their 24-hour-a-day operations center. It's in connection with the rest of the State Department's operations center. It took them about four months to accept me, because

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they had to get clearances from the police in Niger. Now think of that. First of all, the police were basically nonexistent, basically not very literate, so I was held up for several months while the State Department putzed around on this particular thing. But I finally got to work, and I worked about ten months there before we were sent on..

*Q: How did the INR sort of watch-officer system work?*

HECK: Well, it was a 24-hour day, three-shift-a-day sort of a thing. Our specific brief was to watch for intelligence items to call to the attention of the Secretary of State. Kissinger was then the Secretary. He was a very difficult person to work for, as I'm sure others have told you. He wanted everything, for instance, typed for him. He would not read telegrams, so whenever he traveled, anything that we wrote for him, and this was the daily brief, had to get there earlier than normal. If he had been in Washington, it could have been there before, but if he were in Massachusetts seeing his children, it would have to be there at two. He would take with him a secretary, and her specific job was to put this on eight and a half by eleven paper in a format he could read, because he would not read it as a cable, which meant that everything that we did had to be jacked up, and he was always traveling. My major remembrance from this is that when President Ford left and President Carter was elected, there was a good deal of happiness in the operations center both on the regular State Department side and on the INR side, because all of us were given another two hours. The next Secretary of State, who was Cyrus Vance, didn't require all this stuff. He would read it in cable form. He would read it on a piece of paper that was just handed to him, and it made our lives much easier. But what we did was to look at the security and the intelligence side of a thing and to keep the hierarchy in the State Department informed, which was, of course, easier during the daytime than at night. More responsibilities were laid upon you at night. It was a very interesting job, I think, for any person who goes into the operations center, whether they're doing the regular State Department "ops" or the intelligence operations center. It's a job for the young. When you have been on a three-week set of tours and it's the end of your third week and you're pushing forty, it can be very tiring, but I enjoyed it as far as it went. I liked the fact that you could work very hard



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for eight hours and you never had to think about it after that, because people who came after you picked up all of your things so that there was never any carry-out or carry-over.

*Q: I would have thought there would have been carry-over.... I mean, when you arrived, you sort of had to know what was going on before, didn't you?*

HECK: Yes, well, you got a piece of paper that told you, or at least you were given a briefing that told you more or less what had happened in the last eight hours. The bothersome thing - and I suspect that probably continues today - is that you're asking a lot of middle-grade, lower middle-grade, officers to look like they know a great deal at a time when they probably don't. I don't know what we lose in that equation, but it always bothered me that I had to sound so knowledgeable. It's one thing if it's at eight at night and you can call somebody and ask, but if it's at two in the morning, you probably don't call anybody, and then you expound.

*Q: To whom were you expounding?HECK: Well, the papers that you write are given to the so-called seventh-floor principals, the Secretary and the various under-secretaries and whoever else is on the seventh floor, as opposed to the sixth floor who get it later in written form delivered to them at eight.*

*Q: The sixth floor being the...*

HECK: The sixth floor being the assistant secretaries for the regional bureaus and things like that, East Asia, South Asia, Middle East, also the INR person, but seventh floor principals are the Under-Secretary and others. They're all under Secretary, except the Secretary of State and his deputy. So the documents go up to them well before seven in the morning, and they get down to the Assistant Secretary at about eight.

*Q: Did you ever run across any conflict with, say, CIA interpretations of things?*



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HECK: Very often, and this may have changed. We would have round-robin telephone calls among the various parts of the intelligence community when we would discuss various things if there had been something that came up that triggered it. Yes, very often the State Department was on the down side, was against whatever it was that the Agency, CIA, thought about it or perhaps what DIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, thought about it. I think it was very apparent certainly to me and I think to my compatriots that the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the State Department was one of the very smallest and least, therefore, influential parts of intelligence, which did not mean that we didn't think we were smarter than all the others, just that we didn't have the wherewithal or the backing to push our point of view. Yes, it was a difficult situation.

*Q: Just to get a little feel for this, here you are, you say you've got an eight-hour time to be knowledgeable about every part of the globe, and you're up against a much larger CIA establishment and all. How did you know when to have a different view than they or the Defense Intelligence Agency?*

HECK: I think that you would agree that State Department people tend to be quite pleased with themselves about their level of intelligence. I don't ever remember feeling cowed on that point. It was that I didn't have the backing to stand up behind me later on, but I never doubted for a minute that I was at least as bright and at least as capable of deciding what something meant as anybody else, and I suspect that's probably very true of most people working for State. The Agency people, the CIA people, tended to be very good. I have to admit that I was impressed with the level of their ability. Of course, we were doing a worldwide brief, so that the chances of something coming up on my shift that had to do with NATO, which really mattered to our military, were pretty slim. I was more likely to get something on some small island in the Pacific or Africa, Asia or Latin America. On those things I thought they were awful, they were dumb. That's a terrible thing to say, and I will probably strike this from the record when you give it to me in writing.

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*Q: I wouldn't, because I think it's important to gain the impression.*

HECK: But the impression was that they probably knew a great deal about what they wanted to know about, but they didn't have to know about most of the world, because during the Cold War the world was very spotty. I mean by that that we cared a great deal about Europe, we cared about Cuba - there were some specific places - Panama, but the rest of it sort of drifted by the military.

*Q: You were doing this roughly part of '76 and part of '77, and then Doug was off to...*

HECK: He was off to Nepal. Now we're back in the days twenty years ago where it was almost impossible. They had finally allowed as how people could work who were married to each other. There could be a tandem couple working, but it was almost impossible to find an area where a tandem couple could work. It has gotten simpler in the twenty years since, but in those days there was no question but what I could not work in Nepal. I could work in India, but in those days the price of a ticket round trip on the weekend would be approximately what I had earned during the week, a little bit more. There were cheaper rates for people who were from the region, but, of course, I was a foreigner. We decided it just was not worth it for me to work five days a week in Delhi, where I could have gotten a job, and fly into Nepal and work over the weekend planning recipes and sorting out things for the house to do for the next week and then flying back to Delhi to work again. So I did not do that. Now it has gotten easier for tandem couples. On the other hand, tandem couples have gotten more numerous, and so it's hard to find places to put them. I don't know which is easier or better, but the fact remains that it is difficult for married couples.

*Q: You were in Nepal from '77 to when?*

HECK: To '80.

*Q: As you saw it, how did Nepal strike you?*

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HECK: Well, Nepal was by 1977 beginning to come out. Nepal had been a hermit kingdom, as people who know about Nepal probably already know. There has been royalty there for many, many years, but the royal family had been in effect captive for 100 years by a family of hereditary prime ministers, who basically kept the king amused with women and drugs and things. The royal family only came into power after Indian independence. India was very instrumental in bringing them into this. Once again, when we were there, the royal family was a hereditary and absolute monarchy. It went through a period of introspection and in early 1980 an election which allowed it to maintain its hereditary monarchy, but it was beginning to change. Of course, after that period the country has changed dramatically. The monarchy is no longer absolute and no longer controls everything, but while we were there, it was very much that. It was a very conservative society, which is not to say that there weren't things going on on the periphery, but the period of democracy had been some years before, 15 years before. My husband had been there to set up the embassy. There had been a prime minister and a government that really mattered. That disappeared, and the government was in effect exiled, and the politicians were exiled. So when we were there, it was a very conservative and a non-political society. Just before we left in 1979-1980, the beginnings of a return to a democratic system were in train, and some of those politicians would come back, and it was a very exciting thing to meet the men who had been, if not worshiped, at least very much admired by a number of people but had been totally gone during our period there. On the other hand, the king, who was and is a very sweet man, his father, who had been raised in the period of repression when the royal family was basically nothing, had tried to make the current king into a modern man, and he had sent him away. He had sent him to England, to Eaton, I believe, or Harrow. In any case, he sent him to England to a boarding school. He was sent to the United States. He went to college for a while in the United States. He was supposed to go to Japan for a while. That, I think fell through at the last minute because of things happening at home, but still he had been sent out to learn what the world was like. My husband had been instrumental in caring for him when he was in the U.S. as a young man, and inviting him into his home for holidays and things like that,

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so we had a special place with the king, and that was nice. In fact, we had gone when we were in Niger, we had a private invitation from the king for his coronation, and we did in fact go from Niger to Nepal for that. So my husband has had a better working relationship than perhaps somebody in the same boat. Where that got him I don't know. The king was and is, as I said, a very good man, a very nice man, probably not a terribly bright man and probably not a terribly politically astute man. Now it doesn't matter so much, but when he was the absolute ruler, it mattered a great deal.

*Q: Well, going back just a touch, it sounds like Doug was an ideal candidate to send out as ambassador, but in Nepal always, because of mountain climbing and all, seems to be rather high on the political preferential list. Do you have any feel about how we were able to send a qualified professional there instead of a friend of the President's?*

HECK: Well, the country has been high on the political list for the very reasons you cite. He replaced a political appointee, and he was himself replaced by a political appointee. The thing that attracted both his predecessor, who was Margarite Maytag, and his successor was mountains. You were correct on that. They were both mountain climbers or at least interested in mountain climbing. The question of whether it's good or bad is one that I suspect I'm too close to make judgment on, but I would say that some of the political appointees were very good. The fact that they were political appointees was not by itself a problem, and some of the career people were not very good, so I would still vote to look at each person individually.

*Q: Before you went out, what were you getting from the corridors and people you talked to and from Doug, what were American interests in Nepal?*

HECK: This is the Cold War. The major interest in Nepal for India, for China, for Russia, for the United States was all the same, that it was a border country, that it was the protective layer. The Indians particularly, although they would not admit this publicly, had kept a large contingent of their spy agencies and so on there because of the closeness

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of China, and there had been trouble between India and China going back to the early '60s. Russia and the United States looked at it from a slightly broader perspective, but it was still the same thing, that this was a country that was somehow a boundary between the Communist and non-Communist worlds. So what were our interests? Well, the Cold War. In fact, when we opened our embassy there in the '50s and my husband was the person who was sent up to set it up - there had been a USIA presence but not an embassy presence. It was that we had heard that the Russians were about to open, and we were going to open ahead of them. We made it by about four months. It had nothing to do with whether it mattered. It had to do with what the Russians were doing, and that goes back to the late '50s. Those are the main interests. If you believe in the theory of universality, of course, Nepal is a very important country because of what it contained, Mount Everest and the mountains and all, but if I were the Secretary of State today and had to choose 100 countries, I probably would not put Nepal in there.

*Q: What was the United States doing there? We had AID and Peace Corps and that sort of thing.*

HECK: We had a big AID exposure, we had a big Peace Corps, we had USIA, we had CIA. I think that probably AID and what goes on with AID are the most important aspects. This was an extraordinary little country that goes from 29,000 feet to 100 feet in less than 100 miles. If you don't think that gives you problems in terms of development, let me tell you. This was a country that needed a lot of development assistance, and we were very big in that. Of course, the Peace Corps loved it - lovely people, beautiful landscape. What more could the Peace Corps want?

*Q: What about the embassy staff? How did you find your role there?*

HECK: It was strange. I think, Stu, that my role as a spouse in Africa was much easier, because in Africa, if we didn't pull together, we were going to fall apart entirely. Nepal was a much bigger American presence and a much more divisive or divided American

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presence. It wasn't an us-against-them role that I had seen in Africa. I think I preferred Africa, as much as my husband adored Nepal, and I must say I adored Nepal, but as a spouse it was more work and there were more divisions and more of the silly-rule things that I suspect every ambassador's wife deals with, including unhappy women's groups.

*Q: While I've got you here, can you give me an idea of what some of the divisive things - because these things keep changing all the time, and one of our problems is we take families and we plunk them down into areas where so often it's the man who has work to do and the women don't, and this breeds problems.*

HECK: Well, I remember one thing, which was the American women's association, whatever it was called, and a big - I started to say tamasha which is a very South Asian word and doesn't mean anything to the rest of the world - but a very big brouhaha going on about who was going to elected president. Now what difference who the president of the American women's association in Kathmandu is, or what Nepal has to do with the price of tea in China, God only knows, but anyway it did at the time. My husband was also annoyed with it and wanted it straightened out. We had had a very large USAID presence. The director of the USAID was a very moralistic human being. His wife had a certain attitude about this election and didn't agree with either Doug or me. It was a very unpleasant situation where basically I wasn't prepared to pull rank, and she basically won because I wasn't going to be really nasty about this. If that's what she wants and if her people win, then let them have it. But I remember that this was something that annoyed my husband very much. Maybe it was too comfortable a post. We had a doctor, we had a grade school. Granted that the variety of disease that one could get in Nepal was infinite, but we had so many more services at our beck and call than we had in the small place in Africa that maybe everyone just got a little bit careless or more selfish maybe about how they felt about things. I just think that as a group we were a happier, tighter community in Africa than we were in Nepal.

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*Q: Did you feel that part of your task there was to reach out to the Nepalese women and all, and would that go anywhere if you did?*

HECK: Someone who had come to Nepal from India would probably laugh at this, but it looked so sophisticated to me I couldn't believe it. These were women who had been to college maybe and had been away to school in India. They realized that there was a world out there. Our daily newspaper was called The Rising Nepal, and it always had a happy little thing on the front page which told us what the royal family was thinking about that day. This was not sophisticated in terms of perhaps what a lot of people in the Foreign Service are used to, but it seemed great compared to Africa to me. I felt a lot of empathy with the Nepalese people, a lot more real camaraderie and a real ability to understand and accept what each other was saying, and personally I loved that. I was very happy there.

*Q: I assume the Soviet menace, or whatever you want to call it, was pretty far away, wasn't it? But China...*

HECK: China was very big, and China was by far the most important country for Nepal obviously. It sits on the border. Nepal has a number of refugees from Tibet, which of course borders Nepal. Nepal has always balanced a very fine line trying to keep India on one hand and China on the other satisfied. To them Russia is a long way away, the United States is a long way away, and they're happy with both of us, but neither of us matters to them like China or India. The mountains go across the Chinese border, the Tibetan border, and the flatland goes along the Indian border, so I doubt that you would get any Nepalese to say this to you, but they really are much more scared of the Indians than they are of the Chinese, and you can see why.

*Q: Here you are sort of an Indian hand. Did you find Indians rather heavy handed in their dealing with Nepal from your perspective or not?*

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HECK: In the three years that we were there, we had two Indian ambassadors. The first one, who was a south Indian, I found not at all heavy handed. The second one, who was from north India, I did find heavy handed. I remember the south Indian, Ambassador Mennan, making the complaint once - and I could understand this and appreciate how frustrating it must be. He was in negotiation for his country with Nepal on an issue that had to do with water rights, building a dam, you know, of electricity, and he basically said that every time they came to a solution, they agreed on something, the next day the Indians would be told no, because overnight the Nepalese had decided that something must be wrong if the Indians had agreed to this. Therefore, we have to back away from this one and go further. I can appreciate that. Any big country next to a small country ought to get that point. I think we should appreciate that. The second ambassador that came along, I think, yes, he was very heavy handed. The Nepalese, having worked with the Indians for 150 years, were into looking for this in everybody and probably seeing it more often than not. Nepal has less population than any Indian state. It is just another dinky little Indian state to most Indians. By happenstance it's not a state, it is an individual country, sort of like Bhutan is an individual country, but most Indians don't see any particular reason for Nepal being independent and, yes, they would like to run over it, why not?

*Q: Were you visited by any number of people, sort of high-level visits, at all there? Was it sort of a comfort stop?*

HECK: Well, it was much more a comfort stop than Niger. I can tell you that very few people came to Niger, and part of it was that it spoke French. It's amazing how many Americans are afraid to go to a place where there is no possibility of conversing in a language they understand. In Nepal we had a certain number of cabinet-level visits but not a lot, nothing like India. Everything was tagged onto who was going or not going to India. I would not say that anyone ever, certainly in my time, which was '77 to '80, came out to Nepal as Nepal. We got a few visits from people who were there for mountain climbing reasons, but it wasn't huge, it wasn't huge at all. At that period, the late '70s up to 1980, in



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India things were not so great. Indira Gandhi had lost her office by making the mistake of calling an election at a time when she couldn't win it, and we had a series of non-Congress Party governments, which bounced around and weren't particularly strong, so it was not a time when we were sending a lot of people to India either, and the visits to Nepal would be tacked onto the Indian portion.

*Q: Outside of your and Doug's personal concerns or people you knew, did the take-over of our embassy in Iran and the attack on our embassy in Islamabad have any - in 1979 were there any reflections in Nepal concerning that?*

HECK: There were. In '79 this would have been before the take-over in Tehran but after the trouble in Islamabad. Two of Doug's ambassadorial colleagues, the Russian (then the Soviet), and the Pakistani, both came to him individually and told him that there was a hit team out to get him and that it was Libyan and that they were there. They were looking at several places in South Asia looking to find an ambassador they could get. We lived a block away from the Libyan embassy. There were just some trees and grass between us basically, and we went into a hiding mode. Basically there were two gates on our property, but they both went out onto the same street, so there was no such thing as getting away. You couldn't go in one way and come out the other. The CIA came to him with a bunch of disguises which were sort of ludicrous. If a car comes out of our gateway, then where is it coming from? The State Department wanted to pull him home, and he refused to go. It was not quite time for R&R, or home leave rather. We basically lived with that fear for a couple of months. We kept all the blinds down in the house, and we tried all sorts of strange ways. It was not a very pleasant time in my life. We did finally go on home leave, and when we came back, we were told that whatever the group was, they had gone. So that happened. They didn't find anybody in the general neighborhood. There was no other ambassador in South Asia who was attacked. I don't know how many they might have looked at, but it was not a happy place.

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*Q: While you were there - this was when Carter was President - did the full recognition of China cause any change at all, or did that reflect at all where you were?*

HECK: The Chinese were very careful around us during the late '70s. It had only been five or seven years since Nixon's visit to China, and they were on a very short leash. My husband used to tease them about our wanting to go to China, and the bottom line was that we couldn't go to China until such time as Beijing allowed as how we could come. So we never did make that border crossing into Tibet. But it was something of a cautious duet that was done between the United States and China while we were there. We had relationships. We were obviously both interested in Nepal for perhaps mirroring reasons, and we danced around each other on a number of things. But, no, we didn't have a particularly close relationship one way or another.

*Q: Well, did the situation in Tibet, the Chinese occupation or whatever you want to call it of Tibet, have any reverberations during the time you were there?*

HECK: Well, it was very important background for the time we were there. When the Chinese went into Tibet in the '50s and when the Dalai Lama came out, the United States was very involved in trying to pull down the occupation. We had supported a Tibetan who was geared to do just that, to pull down the Chinese government. Of course, it didn't work. We have never really admitted this publicly. Of course, the Chinese knew. Yes, it made a big difference. The Tibetans who were in Nepal were very much business oriented, business class, I guess you would say. I cannot speak personally for the ones who went into India with the Dalai Lama, who has settled there now, but these people who were in Nepal were absolutely anti-Communist. They were all businesspeople who wanted to have a country that was open to other businesses. What we would do today, of course, is something I would not want to guess, but very much we had been seen as on the losing side in Tibet, because we had put a lot of effort into aiding these Tibetans. In fact, many of them we took as far as Colorado, where we trained them and then dropped them back into Tibet to form that revolution. Well, it didn't work, or rather, it ran its course but didn't work.

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So we had a certain amount of responsibility for the way things were.Q: Well, was there a large refugee community?

HECK: Yes, a considerable community in Kathmandu in the Kathmandu Valley around Bodinau, which is one of the big Buddhist temples there, and in the hills up toward the Tibetan border. There are valleys full of people up to 11,000 to 12,000 feet along the Tibetan border who are themselves related to Tibetans. There has always been a big movement back and forth between these people. They're not Nepali per se, but they do live in that part of the boundary area.

*Q: I was wondering whether the care and feeding of the refugees, support for them, was sort of part of our effort in Nepal or not.*

HECK: No, not by the time that we were there. It may have been before, but the movement of these people was in the '50s basically and '60s, and by the time we got there it was the late '70s. They were well settled, building themselves community, making carpets, living their own lives. The only time I remember us being involved either individually or as an embassy had to do with helping various of these Tibetan/Nepalese getting travel documents, because the Nepalese weren't particularly pleased to call them Nepali, but they had to have a passport if they wanted to travel somewhere. I do remember us getting involved once for someone who was going to go on Smithsonian business or going to do something at the Smithsonian, and he ultimately got himself a passport that said he had been born in Nepal, which, of course, was a crock, but at least it gave him the document that he needed to go on his trip to Washington. We're now into the third generation. These people have been out of their country for 40 years almost.

*Q: Well then, you left in 1980?*

HECK: We left in 1980. My husband retired. We came back to Washington. We missed our trip back to Washington, because I was assigned to be the Afghanistan desk officer, and this was about five months after the Soviets had marched into Afghanistan. So I was

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told, instead of the trip around the world that we had thought we would take when he retired, that I needed to go and visit refugee camps. It was a lovely time of year, May and June of 1980, which is, if you've ever been on the Indian subcontinent, the hottest time of the year, temperatures of 120, and I was sent up to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. I couldn't get into Afghanistan. They wouldn't give me a visa, but I did go and spent a lot of time up in northwestern Pakistan at refugee camps and various places where refugees moved to or settled. Then we came back to Washington, and I spent the next two and a half years being the Afghanistan desk officer.

*Q: This is obviously a time we want to dwell on, so maybe we ought to stop at this point here.*

We'll pick this up in 1980 when you go to be Afghan desk officer, and also we'll talk a little more about what you saw at that time on your trip beforehand at the refugee camps and what you were picking up.

HECK: You know, that was a really scary thing too when I think about it. The State Department wanted to save money, so they wanted me to go, but I had just been a spouse for three years. It was a real mistake.

*Q: So we'll talk about that and then pick up. You were, by the way, Afghani desk officer - is it Afghan or Afghani?*

HECK: Afghan is for the people, and Afghani is the money.

*Q: Afghan desk officer from 1980 until...*

HECK: Until the beginning of '83, and then I took a few months of Hindi to refresh my language skills and went back to India.

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*Q: Today is the 28th of January 1998. Ernie, we're moving to the time, but you became Afghan desk officer. You were doing it from when to when again?*

HECK: Actually I was the Afghan desk officer from the end of May of 1980 till sometime in November of 1982, so it was two and a half years. I had been on leave without pay for three years when my husband was posted in Nepal. In February of 1980 I was brought home on an emergency medical. My father was in the process of dying. I was out in Oregon in late January of 1980, and I received a phone call from Harry Barnes, who was then the Director General of the Foreign Service, who told me that my husband would soon be replaced as ambassador, and would I please stop by Washington and line up a job on my way back to Nepal, and so I did that. I thus learned in late February that I would be going to be the Afghan desk officer. This was at that point about two and a half months after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which took place in December, late December, of 1979. I was in somewhat of a pickle, because in 1980 Nepal was hardly on the information superhighway and there was very little information available, either at the embassy or elsewhere, on Afghanistan. I had been there, of course, and in fact my husband and I happened to be there at the time of the Communist coup that took place in April of '78. We got stuck in the country for a week because the coup had closed everything. But I had no access to any sort of documentation that I needed to, as we say in the Foreign Service, hit the ground running. Of course, Afghanistan by that point, because of the Soviet invasion, was a very big problem on our international plate. We left Nepal in mid-May of that year, and I left my husband and our menagerie, our dogs, in the embassy in New Delhi, where he stayed with the ambassador while I was sent up on my orientation tour. Of course, I could not go into Afghanistan. The Afghans wouldn't give me a visa, because we were very much perceived as an enemy at that point. I spent two weeks in May, when the temperatures are up in the hundreds, in Pakistan along the border at refugee camps and talking to various exiles, talking to the Pakistani government. The United States in that period - this was the end of the Carter Administration - very much counted on Pakistan as a close ally and worked very closely with Pakistan in dealing with Afghanistan, so

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I talked to a lot of Pakistani government people as well as to the Afghans. I took over the job at the end of May/beginning of June. The desk had always been a rather sleepy desk until 1978 when the Communists, the local-grown Communists, first took over the government, but until that point the desk was a very quiet desk, and the person who served on it was back-up for everything in Pakistan and also in Bangladesh. By 1980 it was more than a full-time job. In fact, it was more like a two-person job, but there was only one person, so the working hours very much were sort of seven to seven every day and on Saturday at least but not on Sunday. At the beginning when it was still the Carter Administration, we were not so deeply involved in trying to counter the Soviet presence. We were more concerned at that point with the political situation in the country. Of course, we wanted the Russians out of Afghanistan, but we were not actively engaged in getting them out in the way that we were later on. My job very quickly became a combination of just hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of briefing papers. The subject went into every single high-level talk that our Secretary of State had, or that the seventh floor had, with other governments, so there was a constant writing of these documents; and the other part, which I found personally very difficult because it touched me so much, was dealing with the refugees. We had, of course, had a very big presence in Afghanistan. We were trying to protect the people who had worked for us, basically for USAID but also for the embassy and USIA. A number of them at least had gotten out. They were trying to get to the United States. They were living in refugee camps. To get them into the country involved documentation that they had in fact worked for us. Well, of course, the records were all out in storage in St. Louis, I believe. It was very difficult to prove a lot of things that people who had worked with them knew. So I spent an awful lot of time doing things that perhaps I would have done as a consular officer in other incarnations, trying to help people who were in the camps, basically in Pakistan but also elsewhere, or who had gotten as far perhaps as Rome, where the INS was processing them, or those who were caught in the United States, who wanted to stay and, therefore, wanted asylum. The stories were horrendous. The hardships that they underwent were terrific. I found that a good four or five hours a day had to do with taking care of refugee-related problems, either dealing with

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the Refugee Bureau to give them the sort of information they needed to make the State Department recommendations on these particular cases that they had to weigh in on, or in dealing with the refugees themselves. We had at that point two previous very senior Afghan diplomats who had been ambassadors to the United States here in the country. They took it upon themselves to call me regularly, as did every Afghan who was here, and I fielded things all day long. It was a very frustrating time, because I did want to help them and there was so little I could do. I acted as a facilitator, however, in a number of cases and tried to straighten out the awful problems that they were having with INS. I was very upset to see the way INS operated. I went down to the INS office here in Washington, the regional office for Washington DC, once at the behest of a man who was actually a royal prince from the old royal family, who had been the number two in the embassy here. He had been the deputy chief of mission. He was desperate to regularize himself. This was not in 1980 but a little later. He had been here long enough to apply to start the process of regularizing himself, but they had lost his records. There was a file with his name on it, and it contained the file of a single Vietnamese woman. Nobody could find his papers, and until they could find his papers, he couldn't apply for anything, and until he could apply for something, his kids would never be able to get into college because they would not be able to qualify. It was this sort of thing. In the meantime, he was selling ties somewhere, Brooks Brothers or someplace. I was very upset to see how the records were kept at INS, that they were all in cardboard files lined up on open shelves. There was no modernization there at all. It was very difficult. With the passing of time, particularly after President Reagan took over, our Afghan policy became very much more proactive. Earlier on there had been a lot of trying to focus things through Pakistan. President Zia was not at all happy with the United States at that point for some very AID-related reasons. He called offers that we had made for help peanuts and was generally not helpful, but when Reagan came, things did change and suddenly the United States became an active player. By that I mean the CIA got very much involved.



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*Q: I'd like to go back to the Carter time. This would be up to January of 1981. Being on the NEA side and you had this problem, everything was so focused on the plight of our people in Tehran and all, this was the focus, did you feel it was hard to get people to concentrate on what you were doing?*

HECK: You're very right. The political appointees of people in our building, as in the White House, were entirely engrossed in what was happening in Iran, and for Afghanistan it was too bad, but it was Iran that was the engine that pulled all of our policy at that point. We got a few gestures from Carter. He refused to let our athletes go to the Olympics that year. This was not a State Department - at least it certainly was not an NEA initiative. I don't know for a fact that it didn't come from one of the other bureaus, Human Rights or Refugees, but this was a gesture that he made, I gather, thinking it would be relatively painless. But other than that, a little bit of tough talk, we didn't do anything about the Soviets either to protest what they were doing or anything else, because quite frankly I think we wanted their help in getting our hostages released, and they, although not in the forefront, were one of the players that could be drawn upon.

*Q: Again, sticking to the Carter time, because there is a real division between the two times, were you able to get any help? Here you were feeling all these things, and yet we had a massive, you say, AID effort before. There must have been X AID people who were around who dealt with Afghanistan. I'm thinking of what happened after the collapse of Vietnam and trying to assist people there. Was there any effort made by AID to help its former employees, or were you able to co-opt any people to help them?*

HECK: Well, I'm not sure that I would say AID as an organization but most definitely individuals who had served there. Afghanistan was a country very much like Nepal in that same period. People loved serving there. A lot of AID employees and retirees as well as from other organizations worked very hard to get individuals out of camps and into the United States. State Department officers did the same thing - State Department people, I should say, because it wasn't just officers, it was everyone. There was a great deal



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of individual effort, whether it was in vouching for someone or trying to make a case to some consular officer or some INS officer somewhere or trying to find some organization which would sponsor them coming to the United States as refugees, the IRC for instance. There was a good deal of that. In fact, I know of State Department officers who stopped in places in Europe to make a case for a specific Afghan to sort of grease the skids so that some friend who had worked for him or her could get a visa when the time came. Yes, there was a good deal of that, but we kept running into the fact that nobody higher up in the Carter Administration, as far as I could tell, was particularly involved in any particular case. We would run into things. For instance, a lovely woman who had been a very senior employee of USIA in Afghanistan and who was then in her fifties was able to come into the United States, and she was the senior child who needed to take care of her parents, rather her father, who was quite old. We ran into one of these things where they weren't going to let this man, who was about 80, come in because he had two wives. Well, of course, they were in different places. He had taken a second wife 40 years before and had provided for the first wife but had never been around her since then, and we couldn't get him. We couldn't find anyone in the administration who could understand the cultural mores there enough to let the old man come to the United States, so there he was in a camp in a refugee situation in Germany with the second wife, who was in her seventies by that point. There was a child here who could help but couldn't bring them in, and because the child was an asylee, I believe - she had been in the US when this had happened - she didn't have papers yet upon which to travel. She couldn't go to see him. He didn't speak German. There he was. It was that sort of thing we ran into constantly. It became easier after the administration changed, simply because there were more likely to be people in the next administration who were free, having solved the Iran problem, to concentrate on this.

*Q: Who was the head of NEA at that time?*

HECK: I believe it was Hal Saunders, but I would have to go back and look.

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*Q: We can check on that later on. How about Congress? Again, let's stick to the Carter period first.*

HECK: There was obviously a strong anti-Communist, anti-Soviet rather, strain in the Congress which made for some pretty strong rhetoric, but there again it was of secondary importance to us then. I think we're all forgetting how very much Washington was tied up in 1979 and '80 with our people in the embassy in Tehran. We never were able at the beginning to get enough support to make a tremendous amount of difference on the Hill. People said all the right things, but we weren't prepared as a nation to go beyond that. We certainly were not going to go to a land war in Afghanistan.

*Q: This is one of these things. I've talked to people who served there and saw the troops come in, and they couldn't quite figure out what the hell this was about. It was a coup against the Communist government. What were you getting about the rationale for this?*

HECK: In April of '78 Prince Darood was the prime minister when the homegrown version of the Communist Party ran a coup in April of '78 and took over the government and murdered as many of the Dowage family as they could find and then hung the rug out on the street so everyone could see the bloody carpet where they had mowed down 30-some people. The original coup was something of a surprise to the Soviets, as far as we knew, and it quickly deteriorated into a particularly vicious form of back-and-forth between two branches of the Afghan Communist Party with lots of people being thrown into very, very awful prison conditions, lots of people being killed, prime ministers of Afghanistan dying under some very awful situations. The Soviets - this was Brezhnev - presumably did what they did to try to bring some order into the situation. For that a certain strain of thought in the American government had to be "thank God," because the Afghans were doing unto each other some pretty terrible things. When the Soviets came in, they would like to have made Afghanistan into a Soviet model if not a Soviet state. It deteriorated quite rapidly, and they ran up against the rocks of Afghan intransigents that we are seeing today in 1998. The Soviets, I think, thought they were doing good by sending the troops in

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and did not expect what they found out to be a very difficult situation. The United States, just as a reaction to any Soviet invasion of any other country, was bound to be against it even if intellectually perhaps we would have preferred to have a quiet Soviet-style Communism to what had already taken place, which was a violent, vicious, Middle Ages form of oppression. But, of course, the overriding thing was that it was the Soviets and, therefore, we were against their action. People tend to not understand how ungovernable Afghanistan has been since the beginning of time. There have been periods when there has been a king in the center who is the titular head of an entire nation. In fact, that goes back basically as long as the United States has been an independent nation. But in effect the presence in Kabul, the capital, was just that, a presence, and it was tolerated by everybody else because the presence in Kabul really didn't infringe upon their own region to any degree at all. When the Soviets came in, they didn't see this as the way to govern, of course. It wasn't the way one governed in the Soviet Union. They tried to impose some order on Afghanistan. Well, it just doesn't work. They tried to make things better for women. They wanted education for all, both boys and girls. I don't see how we could be against any of that, but, of course, the Afghan people, at least the Afghan powers that be, were not at all pleased with this sort of thing. They didn't want power. They didn't want Kabul to interfere with what they were doing in other parts of the country, because it had always been a country ruled by local strongmen and sort of governed to the least possible degree from Kabul. So on one hand what the Soviets tried to do at the beginning was basically something that was pretty benign, but the Afghans themselves didn't allow that to happen. When the Afghans began to rebel against this by fighting, the fighting was totally homegrown little patches of people, different valleys, different subgroups of a major ethnic group, doing things individually. It took a long time for any amount of coalition to happen. By the time I arrived at the end of May of that year, the Soviets had been there for five months and a little over. There were at that point basically six major organizations among the Afghans, which were tighter or looser depending on which organization it was, each claiming to be the major rebel organization. The strongest group at that point was led by a man who is still quite active, and that's Govadene Hekmakyar, who had been trained as an

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engineer but who was outside the country in Pakistan and had been for some time. There were smaller groups run by religious leaders. There were a couple of groups run by men considerably older, secular leaders of the Pashtun people, who are the dominant ethnic group in the eastern half of the country and the group to which the leaders of the country had always belonged. There was at least one group which was not Pashtun, but basically the major groups were Pashtun-led, and the area in which they fought tended to be a semi-circle, a quarter moon backed up against the Pakistani border. On the Iranian border there were smaller groups which were ethnically and linguistically more tied to Iran. The refugees split in both directions. A couple of million of them by that time, almost 3,000,000, were in Pakistan, but there was also a large number in Iran. The ones in Iran we never had any ability to get to or to deal with. The Iranian government, for reasons of its own, supported groups on the Iranian side of the border fighting against Soviet powers in Herat and to the western side of the country. Pakistan was very much involved supporting particularly Govadene Hekmakyar's organization but funneling money and weapons into the various Pushtun groups on the border with which a number of Pakistani citizens had, I think, ties. Saudi Arabia was putting money and help in. It became quite an international cause, some of the Muslims for religious reasons and anti-Communist reasons, and also the West. We, even during the Carter Administration, had a number of young Americans - not a huge number but enough - who went over to sneak into Afghanistan. The theory was always that they were doing freelance journalism, and a number of them did, in fact, write things which they could then, if they could get in and get out, peddle to various American publications. Some of these sold their stories to valid organizations. There were, in fact, a couple of stringers for American newspapers who went in. Soldier of Fortune went in, of course; you would expect to see them there.

*Q: This is a magazine designed for people who have a love of - military adventurers the title of the magazine implies.*

HECK: Indeed, and these were always problems to us, because every once in a while one of them would get into trouble, would disappear, would be lost. In one case - I believe it

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was right around Christmas - somebody got killed inside Afghanistan, but he was not an American citizen. He was an Afghan citizen living in the United States. I do not remember if he was a refugee or an asylee. This sort of thing was another problem that we had on the consular level. In the meantime we had maintained an embassy in Kabul. Because of the diplomatic saber rattling, we had put some very strong, strict constraints on the Afghan embassy here in Washington both in terms of numbers of staff they could have and in terms of the distance they could go from Washington. They in turn did the same thing to us. One of my major problems, although this was basically the responsibility of the NEA/EX, the executive part of our building, the administrative part of our bureau, but I did a lot of hand holding and taking care of our embassy in Kabul. I think we had 19 at the beginning and were knocked down to 15. This had to cover a variety of services. We had, of course, gotten rid of everything that was nonessential. There were no families. The tours were hard and short. The embassy had at least two branches of intelligence there plus the State Department people, and these men lived in a real fortress sort of a situation. It was hard for them to get in and out. We would only allow them to fly in and out on Indian airlines. They were not allowed to take the Afghan or Soviet flights, at least during the period I was there. So they could only go in and out through New Delhi, and there weren't enough flights and flights were crowded. Supplying them, keeping them running, and communicating with them were major problems. They were not allowed to keep anything classified at all, because they could be overrun at any point, and they were left in the meantime with this huge embassy, at least for a small number of men, filled with all the accoutrements of a rather large, family-oriented mission. I know it sounds funny, but we had things to think about like how to draw down the commissary goods. They had a huge commissary. We, as I remember, got rid of a lot of it by peddling it to other diplomats. What to do with the high school, what to do with the new scoreboard that had just been purchased for the athletic field at the school, a tremendous number of things to take care of, cars to get out because people had been sent out in a hurry. So there was a lot of things that I never would have thought of. Because it was an embassy running on the edge whose main job was to keep us as apprised as possible of what was

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happening in Kabul - you couldn't travel, of course, at that point in country - but they fed us tremendous amounts of very useful information on what was going on on the ground in the city and amongst the Afghan leadership that was the putative leaders of Afghanistan, led by Babrak Kamal at that point, whom the Soviets had put in. Because they were there basically at that point for the intelligence function for us - or as political reporters, perhaps you could say - I found that as a desk officer I got to do a lot of the things that they would normally do as an embassy. For instance, I had to write the human rights report every year. I wrote three Afghan human rights reports, and this was a report that really mattered, of course, because this was one of the few that raised a good deal of interest in the United States as one of the most egregious examples of how human rights could be violated. So there were that sort of reports which were dumped on the desk in addition to everything else, and lots of journalists who wanted to be briefed, people who were going out to the region to write on the story, members of the Hill who needed to be briefed, so I had a very busy job running between all of these various posts.

*Q: You say you had to write briefing papers and talk about - again, back to the Carter period and then we'll move on. Did you have a problem sort of explaining that this was really a chaotic situation - there's always a tendency to try to simplify and say, well, it's the good guys against the bad guys - to give the Congress and the rest of our Department a feel for Afghanistan?*

HECK: I think that there was a good deal of simplification. There were a number of people in my own hierarchy in the State Department who felt very strongly about the need to get the Soviets out long before perhaps the Agency began to get more active in trying to do something along that line. Yes, there was a good deal of making it the good guys versus the bad guys. To its credit INR was persistent in trying to keep the State Department's nose pointed in the right direction, and it pointed out regularly, constantly as a matter of fact, how complicated and murky the situation was and how it wasn't all black and white.

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Yes, that was a constant battle both within the Administration and on the Hill. It was just easier to make it anti-Communist.

*Q: Was there a certain amount of almost - the term is wrong but - chortling on the part of people within the Administration, State Department or elsewhere that you were getting? We had had our nose bloodied, as you and I both know very much, in Vietnam, and looking at Afghanistan and saying, boy, they're going to get it and come on in, fellows, get immersed in this and you'll really regret it, and aren't we glad you're doing that. Was there any of that feeling?*

HECK: Yes, there was. Here again, I think that was particularly evident during the Reagan years among the conservative branch of the Republican administration. There were a number of people who felt that way, who really wanted to teach the Soviets a lesson and sort of pay them back, I guess you might say, for some of their actions in the '70s in Vietnam. I'm sure it was there among the Carter Administration people also. Looking back from a vantage point of 17 years, I think that among the Carter people in the White House and to a certain extent in the State Department, there was more of an interest in the human rights violations aspect of it among the Carter people. But, yes, there was a certain amount of showing the Soviets how things were. Q: Did you get any feeling? This was happening at the top, but was it reflected down? Jimmy Carter had come in in 1977 with the idea that one essentially can do business with the Soviets, we can reach agreements, and let's not be confrontational and all. The big shock was apparently what happened in Afghanistan. Did you sense any of that being reflected down where you were?

HECK: I think that there was a feeling of betrayal almost by what Brezhnev did by ordering the incursion into Afghanistan, that somehow he was moving ahead on the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, and that this was unfair that the Soviets did it. Brezhnev apparently thought it was going to be an easy in and out, and, of course, he was getting very sick and he didn't have to pick up the pieces. I think that a number of the Soviet people probably felt the same way, that it was unfair going in, that there was no



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need to go in. When the Soviets first went in, they sent a number of troops who were close by, and that included people from Tajikistan, particularly Tajikistan, and from the other border states which had a large non-Russian ethnic population. A number of these people were reported - now I was not there, but this is the reports that we got - to become quite easily sympathetic to the Afghan position on the Soviet invasion and to begin to question their presence, the Soviet presence, in Afghanistan. There are stories that they also got very interested in the religion and the Soviets then began to withdraw the ethnic non-Russian troops in order to keep the "poison" of Islam from seeping back into the Soviet Union. Whether or not this is true or whether it was just a matter of logistics, it is true that there were more ethnic non-Russians there at the beginning than there were later on. So there was some disagreement even within the Soviet Union of what was happening, but they quickly found out that they had gotten themselves an ungovernable people in a terrain which is very difficult to handle, as the British had found out 150 years before that.

Q: 1939.

HECK: Yes, and the other two Afghan wars afterwards, all three Afghan wars - a very harsh people who take no prisoners basically and who do some pretty harsh things, so it quickly became a war of some unpopularity within the Soviet Union. They were not able to mount the sort of protest that has been seen in more recent times in Russia about Chechnya, but it was the same sort of feeling among a certain number of people whose sons were being sent off, that they did not like this war at all. In fact, one of the major crises that we had - this would have been, I believe, after President Reagan came in - a Soviet soldier, just a private, a kid, broke into the embassy, got into the embassy grounds and tried to seek asylum with us in the center of Kabul. Of course, there was a strong desire to be able to give him asylum in certain quarters in the government and great sympathy for his personal plight, but we had no way of giving him asylum. There we were with 15 human beings in the embassy, 15 American human beings in the embassy, and one Soviet soldier. What are we going to do?



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In any case, the Soviets promised that they would treat him kindly and not put him into a prison situation, but we never heard from him or saw him again, and there was no way of knowing whatever happened to this poor schnook, who may have been taken out and shot the next morning, because life for Soviet recruits or even Russian recruits now in the post-Soviet army is not nice. Basically the Soviet soldiers soon learned that they were dealing with an enemy that was much harsher than they had expected, and it became a very, very hard situation for them.

*Q: What were you getting - we're not obviously sticking completely to the Carter thing - in this earlier time about the Iranian support down near Herat? This was a time when we were, as you mentioned, focused on Iran, the Islamic revolution, and we had our people hostages from our embassy in Tehran and all, and you had these Iranians messing around in an Islamic thing in the western part of Afghanistan.*

HECK: Well, the Afghans who live in the western part of Afghanistan speak a language which is very closely related to Farsi, to Iranian Persian, so their form of Persian made it very easy for them to go back and forth across that border. When the Soviets began to flex their muscles in Herat and elsewhere in the west, a number of refugees were generated across the border. Also, of course, Iranians had been receiving Afghans for years and years. Iran was such a much richer country that the very poor would very often go over there and would work in the bazaars as laborers and things like this, so there has always been the back and forth. The Iranians, beside the ties of language, the minority groups in parts of Afghanistan are Shias rather than Sunni Muslims, and so there was the religious support that Iranians over the ages would have given to Shias who were at that point being ruled by Sunni Muslims in Kabul and elsewhere. So there were ties that made it perhaps easier for the Afghans who went into Iran as refugees for whatever reason to live a pretty decent life. I'm not sure that either we or the United Nations knew a tremendous amount about what was happening to these people, because the Iranians didn't want the United Nations Refugee Organization or the various NGOs dealing with

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their Afghans. They preferred to have the rest of the world stay out of Iran at that point. I have a feeling, though, that conditions were probably worse for the Afghans who were in refugee situations in Pakistan. The fighting tended to be heavier around Kabul and environs, and those people, because they were closer to Pakistan, would have gone that way if they were going out as refugees. The Soviets were notorious for trying to seed all the trails with land mines, little ones and the kind that a person stepping on one would do grievous damage to himself. There were a tremendous number of people coming out who had land mine wounds. Things were just a little bit harsher, I think, on the Pakistani side because of the amount of fighting and the number of troops, also because the terrain is much harsher on the Pakistani side.

*Q: When the Reagan Administration came in, what was sort of the expectation prior to its coming? Had anything been said so that NEA and you yourself were sort of mentally bracing yourselves, or do you have any feel for it?* HECK: Well, certainly for the first time the White House got more openly involved in things having to do with Afghans. President Reagan and his NSC people were much more openly supportive of the Afghan freedom fighter in his noble struggle against the Soviet invader.

*Q: You're saying this with a smile.*

HECK: I'm saying this with a smile, because, of course, there was a good deal of interest in socking it to the Soviets here. We were going to bring down the Soviet Union, and in fact the Soviet Union has disintegrated, so I'm not denigrating this at all. I can remember public ceremonies at the White House that the President participated in with Afghan refugee and fighting group people. The NSC, the person who handled the region, would meet with these people as they came to the United States, and in fact I believe that five out of the six major groups then had their leaders coming to the United States in that period of 1981-82. The one exception was Govadene Hekmakyar, who did not want anything to do with the United States, but Rabonee, Mojavivi, Galonee, all of the others came, representatives of Masood, who was the leader in the Panshir Valley, and an ethnic Tajik

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came. They were at that point given appointments within the State Department and the NSC and elsewhere in town, on the Hill. Some of them had some pretty triumphal tours around the city. With the arrival of the Reagan Administration, some of the conservative think tanks got very much involved in lobbying for the Afghan cause and anti-Soviet cause in Washington. The level of American perception of what was happening was raised, I think. Certainly the amount of American participation in what was going on was ratcheted up. The CIA got very much involved in supporting, in what I might call public relations ways as well as in other clandestine fashions, groups inside Afghanistan. It became a major focus of American policy to see the Soviets depart. It became an important thing for this government to get the Soviets out, and, of course, this was helped along by the fact that the Iranian crisis became resolved, if you can call it that, the minute President Carter got on his helicopter and flew out of town. Q: What about dealing with the Afghan Embassy? Was there much with them? How did you see the Afghan Embassy?

HECK: The Afghan Embassy had only two or three people there for the whole time I was in town. The personages tended to change whenever the leadership in Kabul changed, so there had been a couple of permutations of this before I came on board. By the time I arrived and the Soviets were in Afghanistan, Babrak Kamal was the person that the Soviets had put into the leadership role in Kabul. At that point his charg# was named Spartak, which was the local version of Spartacus, which was a hero of the Soviets, who saw Spartacus as an original Communist, if you can call him that. So Mr. Spartak was obviously a good, strong Communist, but when it looked like he was losing his job, he immediately asked for asylum. I think that I had three charg#s ask for asylum during the course of my two and a half years there, and we always accepted them at that point because it was another tweak at the Soviets and their lackeys in Kabul. But they were very much circumscribed. They weren't allowed to see anyone in Washington power circles, certainly not in the Administration. I don't know about the other branches of government, but within the executive branch of this administration, they never got any appointments with anyone. They were not included in diplomatic receptions. They

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were just non-people who kept the embassy open at that point. They were restricted. The small office at the United Nations fared the same way. We kept them on a 25-mile tether. I have often wondered if they ever followed that, because at the same time the FBI and the policy people in Washington told us they didn't have the bodies to keep this closely monitored, but these people were supposed to stay within a 25-mile perimeter of downtown Washington or downtown New York as the case may be. They were basically non-players. To the best of my remembrance, we didn't allow our State Department, people NEA or higher, to speak to the Afghan diplomats, so that when the time came, as it very often did, to ream them out for something or other, I would sit in and be the notetaker, and the person who did the knuckle slapping would be the number two in the Protocol Department, who would read them the riot act.Q: This would be sort of pro forma in a way, wouldn't it?

HECK: Well, it was Richard Gookin, and he was the deputy in Protocol for a number of years, I believe. He did it beautifully. He was very, very good at this. I suppose he had had to do it for other countries which were on the pariah list of the United States for whatever reason. But we just treated them as non-people basically until such time as they asked for asylum, and then we would talk to them.

*Q: Did matters of Afghanistan sort of get kicked up higher up in NEA with the advent of the Reagan Administration?*

HECK: I think they always had gone through my office, which was Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and the relevant deputy assistant secretary who handled South Asia. That pertained in both administrations. But, of course, the political people higher up became more interested, I think, in Afghanistan when Mr. Reagan came. So it was on their platter more often and more likely to be talked about with some forcefulness. Whether decisions were made at a higher lever, I doubt, because certainly we all understood what the policy was and those decisions could continue to be made at the same levels they had been made before. As you know, the Assistant Secretary in NEA has always been almost totally

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immersed in Arab-Israeli issues, so having a deputy assistant secretary devoted to South Asia made that person perhaps a little more autonomous in that region than he might be in another bureau.

*Q: Did you find yourself having a new set of principles with the advent of the Reagan Administration, sort of going on a round of explaining the situation and all that?*

HECK: Explaining it to our allies, you mean?

*Q: No, explaining it to our new political masters, you might say, new people coming in with the Reagan Administration.*

HECK: It was very much a part of the briefing papers for everybody who came in, very definitely, but I think most of them were pretty interested in it already because of the anti-Communist factor and were relatively well briefed even before they came into the State Department.

*Q: With the briefing paper - this, of course, is the traditional task of the desk officer - is it a good place - I won't say push your own agenda, but I mean it gives you a chance to emphasize those points which you consider important. Did you find this a useful tool or not?*

HECK: I think that pushing one's own agenda is much easier on a country about which nobody else thinks, and Afghanistan just had too much attention. It was very apparent what our line was. The President had said it, the NSC said it, and certainly the political appointees within the State Department said it. So I think perhaps we had less freedom in terms of policy on Afghanistan than we would have if it had been the Bahamas or Sri Lanka, at that point or some country like that. On the other hand, it was very gratifying to be working on a country where you knew that the stuff you were writing was being read. So whether it was some sort of a briefing paper or whether it was just a report, when you sent it over to the White House, you knew that somebody did in fact look at it.

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As you know, that's not always the case in some of the other parts of the world. But this was a case about which Mr. Reagan and his Administration felt quite strongly. So in that sense it was rewarding to do this. There was also a good deal, particularly after President Reagan, of speech writing and speaking, speech writing for our superiors in the food chain in NEA. The Secretary of State, of course, had his own speech writers, and for the seventh floor things were written on the seventh floor, but I remember writing speeches for deputy assistant secretaries to use in explaining American policy in Afghanistan to various groups. I also remember going out and doing a certain amount of speaking on my own and doing a tour of radio stations and newspapers to pass the word about what we wanted to be known about Afghanistan and how we wanted to publicize it. Just as you had mentioned earlier or asked about earlier, as I said, there was a group of people who had served in Afghanistan who were very much involved emotionally in the issue. There was also a certain number of scholars who were very much involved emotionally for the same reasons I'm thinking of, political scientists and anthropologists and so on, social science people who had worked in Afghanistan over the years. They were very active in lobbying for more aid to the Afghans, whether that be food aid or weaponry, and they helped in many cases in writing articles for op ed pages around the country. In some cases - I'm thinking now of the center in Omaha at the University of, was it the University of Omaha? There was a very active group of people who had worked in Afghanistan who helped in humanitarian ways in settling people and helping arrange their smooth entry into the United States. It was interesting to watch the Afghan refugees come, because they in many cases came with nothing and, as so many refugees do, worked very hard to set up a new life. I only mention this because it was such a contrast in many ways to the hundreds of Iranians whom I had known personally who came to the United States as refugees a few years earlier with the fall of the Shah. They came usually with money, enough money to live relatively well or at least to get settled and to buy something and to move into a sort of a middle class life. The Afghans came in many cases with absolutely nothing. I helped drum up furniture for houses, and I did a lot of the sort of things that one thinks about if one sponsors a refugee. I don't remember any of that with the Iranians.

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*Q: Was there in the White House, particularly NSC but maybe elsewhere, a sort of a Mr. Afghanistan or a Miss Afghanistan? This was a White House that the President presided, but there were an awful lot of people who were almost pursuing their own thing. Did you have any feel for that?*

HECK: The NSC person during the Carter Administration who handled this and other NEA matters was Gary Sick, who had been a Naval officer. As you can imagine, his major interest was Iran. He was, of course, very good, and I admire him and his abilities and his breadth of knowledge, but during the last six months or so of the administration, which was the only time I was there, he was totally immersed in Iran and, in fact, wrote a book about it later. When President Reagan came in, he put in that position a man named Jeffrey Kemp, who is an ideologue, I guess one would say, a staunch anti-Communist. He himself was originally from elsewhere, from the English-speaking world. I don't remember whether it was from the U.K. or from Australia, but he had some very, very strong anti-Soviet feelings, and he got more involved on a day-to-day basis. Here again, I keep going back to the fact that he could afford to get involved, because the Iranian crisis to an extent disappeared when our hostages were allowed out on the 21st of January of 1981. But he was more likely to take an active role in looking for ways to make the Soviet incursion a little less pleasant and to keep them focused on the fact that they had to pull out. Of course, we used this as a talking point with the Soviets every time we spoke about the region to the Soviets. We were very strong on the need for the Soviet Union to withdraw and let the Afghans have control of their own affairs.

*Q: What about within Congress? Often you find either a senator or a representative or a staff member takes this unto him- or herself and makes it a cause. Were there any people in Congress who were big players?*

HECK: Of course, there were the anti-Soviets, the professional anti-Soviets. Aside from that, the person who comes to mind most rapidly is Congressman Bereuter from Nebraska, a moderate Republican. He represents the Omaha area, and I think part of



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his interest lay in the fact that there was a major academic and cultural interest in Omaha about Afghanistan. That's part of the reason he also was interested in things Asian, and I guess this was part of Asia. Today Mr. Bereuter is the chair of the subcommittee on East Asia in the Congress, so he is still there 17 years later. I was impressed by the fact that he actually wanted to know the facts, asked for briefings, wanted to know exactly what was happening on the ground. It was not a case of wanting to know all of the propaganda-type possibilities in the region but he wanted to know what was really happening.

*Q: One of the things I recall being spread - and I must say I began to get very uncomfortable with some of the things that were put out because they reminded me of the propaganda of World War I - about dropping from airplanes exploding toys and all, which seemed very - the Russians liked children. There seemed to be some of those. Did you find yourself having to look at some of these extreme statements?*

HECK: Yes. The exploding toys story went on for years. Here again, since I didn't actually walk these trails, I am extrapolating a bit, but, yes, there were lots and lots of mines dropped in various ways on trails and places where Mujahideen, the fighters, might go. Unfortunately there were also people who lived there or who passed through there, who were forced to deal with this. These were small, and apparently they had interesting shapes, so the story had become that they were toys. I don't personally believe that there were any toys made. I don't think the Soviets had any interest in blowing up little children, but I do believe - it's easy to tell by the number of children with hands and legs knocked off - that a certain number of innocent children, perhaps a disproportionate number, were injured. I suspect that it was because they were interesting objects and kids like to pick up interesting objects. But there were also adults who stepped on them, women who were going out for water or men who were walking down the trail, and of course a lot of people were hurt. One particularly interesting propaganda - or not, depending on how you look at it - story that went through and was very persistent had to do with yellow rain, about which we have heard in other places.



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*Q: Could you explain what yellow rain was considered to be.*

HECK: It was considered to be some sort of poisonous rain that dropped on people and either injured or killed them, burned or killed them. A certain part of our intelligence community truly believed that the Soviets were disbursing yellow rain, spraying it from airplanes. Of course, it was the sort of thing that some of the journalists picked up because it was an interesting story and because it would have been a particularly damning bit of evidence. Ultimately, after we had trumpeted this and used it in speeches and so on for some months, it was determined that this was really bee pollen and apparently it's a natural phenomenon. Is pollen the right word? No, it's residue from bees in a certain period of the year and probably some pollen also. Anyway, it was was a natural thing that took place in certain seasons of the year. The Afghans obviously were pushing these stories, both about the toys and about the yellow rain. They were looking for all of the things that they could find individually and in separate groups to get more support from the West and from other supporters, i.e., the Saudis, and the support did pour in. When I first arrived at the end of May of 1980, one would receive a visitor, some youngish person who had been in as a journalist or had somehow been up to the border talking to Afghans at length, wanting to tell us what was happening and also wanting to get the United States more actively involved in the problem. They would bring pictures, and the pictures would be of proud Afghan freedom fighters, and there would be a bunch of men standing around. At the very beginning it was always the village elder who was holding the gun and the gun tended to be whatever was at hand. Throughout the two and a half years that I was on the desk, the old men disappeared from these pictures, and it became the young men and the weapons got to be very modern weapons. There were shoulder-held missiles. There were, of course, assault rifles, AK47s and equivalents, and all of the things that go with them, and a lot of weaponry was being pushed in. The war began also to attract, as Bosnia did later, the groupies, and a whole series of Islamic young men from various countries who are, for whatever reason, the soldier-of-fortune types themselves came in and you would

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find stories about a Jordanian or an Egyptian or a Syrian teaching these Afghans how to fire a stinger.

*Q: Stinger being...*

HECK: A stinger missile, a shoulder-held missile against helicopters.

*Q: Basically against helicopters, which was the principal attack weapon of the Soviets in those times.*

HECK: Yes indeed. Of course, other planes were used and they all had an ability to scare people, but helicopters were the major troop movers and attack planes, because they could get low and dirty. So the number of fighters increased and the weaponry got better and the training somewhat better, and the pressure on the Soviets grew. It became very hard for them. I can accept that they must have been very frustrated, their leadership in the field. The mujahadein in many cases were young men or middle-aged men who went off and did this. There were also people who might be considered a mujahid when people approached their village but otherwise were just farmers. People moved in and out. It was a people's militia and a very loosely formed one, if you can call it a militia. So it was very hard not to believe that any male over the age of about 12 and under the age of about 60 was a mujahadein, was a member of the mujahadein.

*Q: Did you get involved at all in briefing or around the decision to put in our sophisticated weapons, particularly the stinger missile which was considered to be sort of key to the halting of the Soviet effectiveness?*

HECK: What we were doing was pretty highly compartmentalized. No, we didn't; certainly not at my level in the State Department, I was not involved in any either participation in decision making or briefing thereon. I did work closely with my counterparts at my level in the Agency, but the decisions were made above them, and it was directives, I believe, out of the White House that went straight to the Agency and to higher levels of the State

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Department.Q: What were you getting and able to pass on from INR, from the CIA and journalists about the freedom fighters, the leadership? There were accounts that they were doing an awful lot of sitting around back in Pakistan squabbling among themselves and making money off the weapons that came in and all that. Were you getting analyses of how this was going?

HECK: It was very much of a mixed bag. There were a few leaders who never left Afghanistan. There were some who basically stayed in Pakistan. The Pakistanis tended to control what went in through Pakistan and to whom it went. That was one major problem because the United States, for instance, might not wish it to be that way, but it was. There was a great deal of disagreement amongst these various groups, who were all in it for different reasons. Well, they were all in it to get rid of the Soviets, but they all saw themselves as the ultimate leader, and they had antipathy or worse toward other leaders, some or all leaders. Part of it was that some of them were determinedly religious and some of them were determinedly secular and some of them were a bit of both. So there were major things that pushed them that were at odds, at loggerheads, with the reasons that others were being pushed. A couple of the leaders - I'm thinking now particularly of Valani and Modadidee - who saw themselves as religious leaders leading this crusade against the godless heathen. Galani particularly was quite a, by Western terms, sophisticated, Westernized, religious leader. Then there were the people who were just the opposite, who were anti-West basically, seeing the West as godless as the Soviets, who just wanted the Soviets out but wanted no part of the religious opium that they saw religion to be. So the only thing that kept a lid on all this was the overriding desire to get rid of the Soviets, and one has seen after the Soviets departed what happened. Now they're at each other's throats since they have all the weaponry and no common enemy, but it was a very fractious lot. This goes back to the good guys versus bad guys. We were so busy as a country playing up the noble freedom fighter that I think we did not pay sufficient attention to what a can of worms we were opening or helping to open in the process. I believe that the two Reagan Administrations and the Bush Administration

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afterwards really thought that things would calm down when the Soviets left, but instead it has gotten, if anything, worse in many ways.

*Q: Were you trying to do any analysis or sorting out whom we should support and whom we shouldn't, or were things just moving so rapidly that this wasn't on your plate at this time?*

HECK: Well, the major desire at that point was to get rid of the Soviets. So we would support politically almost anyone. In terms of where did our weapons go, here again it was a little compartmentalized. I was never part of that chain, but I think that we were pretty much constrained to support almost everyone again on the weaponry thing, partially because of our desire to get rid of the Soviets and partially because the Pakistanis particularly were supportive of the group that we probably distrusted the most and did see to it that some of our weapons got into the group that we didn't like particularly.

*Q: Was there any sort of voice in the wilderness saying, "Hey, you'd better be careful about what you're sowing in this country for later on? I mean things such as the Taliban and these movements."*

HECK: Well, at that point nobody ever thought of the Taliban. That was a very long way down the track. No, I think that we all, all of us who worked on the problem, to a lesser or greater degree really wanted the Soviets out. I don't think that the policy makers were giving much thought at all to what would happen after the Soviets got out. You see, I left early on, in '82, and the Soviets didn't leave until almost, well, it was the end of that decade. We were such a long way from getting the Soviets out that we hadn't gotten to that thought process yet.

*Q: How about the Bureau of Human Rights? Were they taking an interest in how the Afghan freedom fighters and all, I mean, the role of women and things like this, or was this again focused elsewhere?*

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HECK: This was entirely focused - well, almost entirely focused - on the Soviets. Of course, we would have liked to have seen - the Human Rights Bureau would have liked to have seen - the women treated better. Basically, the real repression against women hadn't happened. The problems that we talk about today are those of the Taliban, and the role of women in Afghanistan. It had always been very subservient to that of the men, but it had begun to get slightly better in the mid-'60s when the then king, who by the time I came along was in exile in Rome, had decreed that the women of his family would no longer wear the veil, wear the chador. Even before the Afghan Communist coup, or before the Soviets came in, there had been women in some numbers in Kabul, not in the villages but in Kabul, in government offices and teaching and in hospitals and schools, so the real problems came after the Soviets left. The Soviets were determined to make the role of women better, and the women who came out of Afghanistan into refugee camps found aid in that the NGOs who worked with them tended to pay attention to women. Thus, even though the refugee camps, which were huge, were conservative, there were hospital tents for women just as there were hospital tents for men, and schooling was provided for little girls just as schooling was provided for boys. Of course, they were surrounded by Pakistan, which, although a conservative Muslim country, certainly provides things like education and the right to be on the streets to women. So, up through the point that I was there - although it wasn't the way I would want to live, there weren't the tremendous pressures against women that there are today in Afghanistan. More to the point, as the Afghans were in such large numbers in Pakistan and were there longer and longer, what had begun in 1978 as a genuine welcome on the part of the Pakistani people for their Afghan cousins who were escaping the situation, it began to turn sour. The refugee camps were big, were always located on land which was unfit for anything else. It wasn't as if the farms were being cut up to hold them, but you can't have a long-term refugee population without beginning to run into problems between the community and the natives. In this case the Afghans, being enterprising human beings, a lot of the men began to get involved in things like the trucking business, and - you know what happens when you bring in cheap labor - the local trucking industry began to be pinched because the Afghans were willing

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to haul things more cheaply. So much goes by road in Pakistan, this began to be a sore point between the local people and the Afghans, but basically the Afghans were living relatively well, as well as one could live being a refugee. I think that the Pakistanis were very generous in their welcome to them. One good thing that I should mention because it is so extraordinary are the Kyrgyz from the Wokhan corridor, which is the narrow little neck of Afghanistan that runs up in the far northeast.

*Q: It goes actually to China, doesn't it?*

HECK: Well, yes, it touches China and what is now Tajikistan. It's very mountainous, very high, and the population of Kyrgyz, the ethnic group, was quite small and basically left alone by the rest of Afghanistan. They moved their yaks and other animals. I think they had fat-tail sheep. They moved them up into the higher reaches of this area and down depending on the season of the year, but were basically independent. Once the Soviets came in, one of the things that did happen was that it became very difficult, with the Soviet army being as it was in the country, for the numerous numbers of nomads to move their flocks, or herds rather. So the Kyrgyz were being forced out, and they were very anti-Communist for reasons that go back to the '20s when Kyrgyzstan was taken over by the Soviets. So these people had already become refugees, some of them twice in one lifetime, escaping the Russians once in the '20s, and then when the Russians came into Afghanistan, a number of them moved down into Pakistan and they were living in great misery at an altitude of only about 9,000 feet. This was much too hot for them and uncomfortable, and they were not suited at all to be refugees. It's one thing for a population that tends to be settled to live in a settled situation in a refugee camp, and it's a lot worse, I think, for people who tend never to settle to find themselves in the same situation. So one of the most interesting things that happened on my watch was moving a large number of these people out of the untenable situation that they found themselves in in northern Pakistan. Well, what to do about it. The Kurgiz language is Turkic in origin. Ethnically their features are rather oriental in nature.

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Q: *Mongolian.*

HECK: Mongolian in nature, but anyway there they were, they were very unhappy, and they were picked up, adopted as it were, by Turkey of all things because of the language connection.

The Kyrgyz from the Wokhan corridor were moved and resettled by Turkey on Lake Van in eastern Turkey at an altitude considerably less than where they had been in Pakistan. They are there to this day. I would love to know what has happened to them, but I do not know.

Q: *The Turks have made a great effort to reach out to Kyrgyzstan. I was in Kyrgyzstan about four years ago for a couple weeks, and they certainly made a great effort to insert themselves into things there. I'm not sure how effective it will be.*

HECK: I think it probably will be relatively effective. Just as the Iranians have inserted themselves into countries which used to be parts of the Soviet Union which have a connection with Iran, usually by their language, so too the Turks have done that. It does make a certain amount of sense.

Q: *When you left there in '82, what was your feeling about the Soviet effort? I think at one point, I recall, sort of the word of wisdom around was, well, if the Soviets want to really make the effort, they really can take care of this thing.* HECK: *I think that was probably how most people working on the problem felt at that point, although I don't remember sitting around and talking about it. After all, the Soviets were a major world power. They had a tremendous army. They had modern weaponry that the Afghans didn't have. Certainly when I left in 1982, in November of '82, I did not dream that the Soviets would ever go out with their tail between their legs the way they did. I know I didn't have the proper amount of faith. I believe the true believers believed that it would happen. I didn't. I was happy to see the Soviet Union bogged down, but I didn't think it would actually come to what it did*

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*come to. Basically the Soviets learned, I think, somewhat of the same lesson that we had learned a few years earlier in Vietnam, that a really determined local population aided by geography and fervor...*

*Q: And international support...*

HECK: A modern army can't handle a situation that is in effect medieval, and the Afghans chose to react to things in a way that we hadn't had to consider, or the Soviets hadn't had to consider, for some years, maybe some centuries.

*Q: We have to go back to our Indian wars.*

HECK: That's right. So there the Soviets were with a lot of fire power, but fire power doesn't do very well if you've got 20 men stretched across a large mountainside or hillside, each one of them behind a rock, so it just didn't work. But the Afghans had by that point impressed the Soviet fighting man apparently with the same sort of things that the Afghans 150 years ago had impressed the British fighting man, which means the ultimate cruelty and harshness of capture followed by death. The Soviets were afraid of the Afghans. Of course, I hadn't appreciated this, although I'm sure that our military and certainly our people who handled Soviet affairs must have appreciated this - and that is how badly the Soviet recruit was treated in his own army, so that there was low morale in the troops and fear of being captured by the enemy. Q: Kipling has poems about save one bullet for yourself if you're wounded on the battlefield for the Afghan women to come upon you.

HECK: Yes, that sort of thing, although I don't think the Afghan women were involved much in all this, but still that's the sort of attitude that the Soviets had. We even then were making at least some effort to follow through on leads where Afghans had supposedly taken as prisoners Soviet privates, trying to find out if they were still alive and could we get them and at least for humanitarian reasons try to help the Soviet Union get some of their own people back. At the same time, the Soviet troops - these are young men who are basically peasants themselves - there were things about Afghanistan which lured them,



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I guess is the word I would want. The bazaar area in Kabul particularly around Chicken Street, which used to be where a lot of food and shops were but also places to buy tourist type things, were full of things that the Soviet kids wanted, and there was a good black market going. For instance, even then two things that were just all over the bazaar were Soviet vodka and Soviet caviar, little tins of caviar. There were some stories of weapons being sold and so on, but I don't think in 1981-82 this was much the case, but certainly there was a lot of things getting into the bazaar like the caviar and vodka; and in turn they wanted blue jeans, other things from the West, which were available in the markets there and which continued to be available because trade went back and forth. In Kabul there is a large contingent of Indians and Pakistanis, most notable, of course, the Sikhs because they stand out with their turbans, but there is a South Asian contingent that are people who have run money changing and other operations in the bazaar, and things were coming basically from Pakistan, driven in through the Khyber Pass and Landikoto and the bazaars there. So there were things to buy, and these kids were willing to trade what they had to buy them. There was a good deal of that going on.

*Q: Well, in '82 you left.*

HECK: I was assigned back to India via about five months of a course to remind me how to speak Hindi. So I went off to take Hindi for four months, I guess, and left Washington in early May of 1983.

*Q: How effective did you find this emphasis on Hindi was. I've heard people say they spoke it more in Rosslyn where they got the training than they did when they got to India.*

HECK: Well, we'll cover India tomorrow or next time, but I would say that in three years in New Delhi at that point as a political officer covering internal politics, which is what I went into, I only had one long-term - I mean by that an hour or more - interview with a government official in Hindi in three years. He was an untouchable, what we would call an untouchable, a harijan it was called then and now a dalit, but he was a government

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official, he was an Indian civil servant. It's called the Indian Administrative Service, the IAS, the people who run the country, the follow-on to what used to be the ICS, the British and Indian civil service that ran India before independence. I think he did it as a political statement, because I know that everybody coming into the IAS has to speak or be able to pass a certain amount of tests in English even if he wasn't particularly comfortable. Other than that, I used it on the streets. I used a little bit of it at first, as my predecessor did and I suspect my successor, because I was the official Hindi language officer for the embassy, I used it to establish that I knew something about India and that I wasn't just a dilettante, and then I would go into English, and that's basically the way it went for all of us. Certainly if the idea is communication, any educated Indian's English is going to be better than my Hindi. I did take lessons every day for an hour before I went to work every morning of the three years I was there, so I did keep it up, but I would make one point. In the embassy at the same time - now, as a Hindi language officer or as the official language officer, I got an extra ten percent in my salary for being the Hindi language officer. My first ambassador there was Harry Barnes, who had been in India off and on for at that point, I think, 36 years, who had been studying Hindi off and on for 36 years and who was a tremendous linguist, so that was always intimidating. But what was really intimidating was our science counselor, whose name was Ahmad Meer, who had been born in Lucknow. At independence in 1947 when his relatives, when his parents, went off to Pakistan, he had been left behind with an aunt in old New Delhi, so he was raised up until the age of university in old Delhi speaking Hindi all the time. Then he went to the United States, got his Ph.D., became an American citizen, was back as the science counselor. If there ever had been a real emergency needing Hindi, would they have come to me or to Ahmad Meer? Well, the answer is pretty obvious. So I always felt guilty about my ten percent pay on that.

*Q: But you took it.*

HECK: But I took it.

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*Q: Okay, Ernie, we'll pick this up next time in 1982. We've already talked about your use of Hindi, but then we'll pick up. You were in New Delhi from '82 to when?*

HECK: From 1983, May of '83, until July of '86.

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*Q: Today is the 18th of August 1998. Ernie, after some hiatus we're back in business. We were talking about going to New Delhi in '83. You had had a Hindi course?*

HECK: I had had a second Hindi course. I had done the original Hindi course in 1972, and as soon as I knew I had a 3-3 (useful level), I quit and got married. This was shortly after women were allowed to be married and be in the Foreign Service. So what I had in the spring of '93 was a refresher course to get me into shape for going off to New Delhi.

*Q: So in '83 what was your job?HECK: I was head of the internal political section, general political reporting section of the political section in New Delhi. At that point we had internal, external, pol-mil, labor and I guess that was it, four different sections.*

*Q: How were relations with India at this point and a little about the political situation when you arrived, and then we can talk about developments?*

HECK: I got there toward the end of, although we did not know it at the time, the end of Mrs. Gandhi's period in office. When she had first become Prime Minister, her relationship with the then President of the United States was not very good at all. By 1983 things were slightly better but only slightly, and we were always seen in India as being pro-Pakistani. It has been a sort of roller coaster thing, American-Indian relationships, and it had been a no-win sort of situation, a zero sum game because of what we did with Pakistan. In the spring of '83 things were pretty good. She had been to the United States, and she had had a relatively good experience. Of course, President Reagan could charm the birds out of the trees if he so wished. I got there during the middle of the Secretary of State's

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visit. George Schultz was in town when I got there, and in fact I had to come out a bit early because they needed cannon fodder for the overnight operation center. So I would say that things were in a slightly better situation in the spring of '83 than they had been. However, it was still difficult. We were always seen as a possible ruiner of plans Indian. The foreign hand was shorthand to mean American and other imperialistic intervention or interference in things. Certainly working with the Foreign Ministry - and luckily I did not have to do anything much with that because I was covering internal politics, but I sure heard a lot of it from members of Parliament - sometimes I felt like we were under Chinese water torture with little drops of barbs coming down on us daily.

*Q: Was the Foreign Ministry a bit or more so than I understand in Mexico? In Mexico they give the extreme left, the intellectuals, free play to play around because we have very close relations. The Mexicans can do their macho thing by sticking us there. I was wondering whether you had this feeling that there was something of that in the Foreign Ministry.*

HECK: Oh, to a certain extent, yes definitely. The number of younger officers who had come out of JNU, which is Jawaharlal Nehru University, was probably larger than from many other universities, and they tended to have a leftist slant to things from their own background. There was also a certain amount of sort of castism, I suppose, a certain amount of supercilious Brahmanism. At least, that's what we would see it as at times. But it's like all things in India. You can find anything in India. In many ways the Indians and the Americans are an awful lot alike, and there is good and bad in all sorts of places. I do think that it was difficult to deal with bureaucracy at times, and certainly it was difficult to deal with politicians at times in the early '80s.

*Q: Can you talk about the politics of the early '80s and how you got around and dealt with the internal politics and how we saw it with American interests.*

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HECK: Well, first of all, I should say that the idea of reporting on internal politics was something whose time had passed by the time I got there, although I hated to admit it. Being a political officer in India in the '60s, say, was more sexy in a sense and it was when this sort of system was set up. I did the same thing, of course, that political officers covering internal politics in India in the '60s had done. The difference was that it really didn't matter to have me or other embassy reporters going out into the countryside to report on what specific districts or district leaders thought about any policy in New Delhi, for two reasons: one, because power was so centralized in the hands of Mrs. Gandhi and the Cabal that ran the Congress Party at that time; and two, because our reporting function back to Washington had sort of been superceded. We were doing the same job the New York Times reporter was doing except the New York Times reporter got a lot larger spread and was probably read first in Washington because it got into the paper, it got into the operations center, and it got spread around. A few years later, of course, we were completely superceded by satellite television. So being an internal political reporter in India today just doesn't have the urgency or sense of urgency that it did before. In fact, the job has really atrophied since I left it. But what I did was a lot of traveling. First of all, we have three consulates general plus the embassy in India, so in terms of political reporting, the country was quartered, but, of course, Embassy New Delhi had control over everything that went out from the regional consulates general. My reporting area, therefore, was northern India or northwestern India. It comprised Kashmir, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi City. First of all, Punjab was off limits to us by the time I got there. There was an insurgency of some import going on at the time. The Akali Dal, the Sikh Party, which had a strong religious bent to it, was running rampant through the area, and although it was perfectly safe for us to go to large parts of the state of Punjab, the embassy front office had decreed that we could not. So Punjab, absolutely the most interesting political problem in the area at the time, was off limits except for what we could report from New Delhi. So that left me the rest of it. Kashmir, large parts of it, were off limits because the army wouldn't let us into it, but we could go to the Vale of Kashmir where Srinagar, the capital, is. And that left us the rest of the area. I did a lot of traveling.

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I was out in places like Gorakhpur, which is in the northern part of Uttar Pradesh in the sugar belt near the border with Nepal. I did a lot of coverage of Uttar Pradesh. Of course, the population of Uttar Pradesh is huge. At that point it was about 121,000,000 people as I remember, so it was larger than many countries and very important. It was at that point the linchpin upon which the Congress Party depended to run the country. Of course, some years later, 15 years later, it's totally non-Congress in terms of the parties that hold power there, and the whole Congress Party strategy has shifted, but at that time it was very important. So I spent a lot of time in places like Allahabad and Benares and so on. Then I divided the rest of my district with the other political reporter from the internal political side, so we had a sort of division of half and half of the region. We probably traveled once every six weeks or so for perhaps a week at a time. Q: Sometimes part of the reporting is to get out and meet people who may come up later on, and make your mark and all with them and all. Did you have feeling of that or picking out comers and cultivating them a bit?

HECK: We did a certain amount of that, but really if you're traveling in that area, we might get back to a place once every eight or ten months. It didn't really give us a chance to do that in depth. We did it certainly in New Delhi, and we relied on the entire mission for that sort of information, lots of it from, for instance, USIA, the USIS office there. We had at that point a counselor of embassy who was the labor counselor. That position has been downgraded, but we relied on other sections of the embassy to fill us in on different groups of people in the country. Remember, even then the population was almost 920,000,000 in the country, and it's very hard to pick out people, but, yes, we did the best we could on that.

*Q: What were the issues between the United States and India that from your perspective the embassy was concerned about?*

HECK: From my perspective the thing that mattered most was the Indo-Pak relationship, what India might or might not do in terms of nuclear proliferation, what it might do in terms of fighting with Pakistan over Kashmir, most definitely what it was doing in the state of

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Punjab to diffuse the situation in Punjab. There was a great deal of belief in the country at the time that Pakistan was arming and aiding the Sikh insurgency movement, and in fact there is truth to that just as India aids and abets various things that go on in Pakistan. There is a great deal of clandestine work back and forth across the border, I think. Certainly it always reminded me of that cartoon strip that used to run many years ago and maybe still does in Mad Magazine with the spy versus spy. There was a good deal of that back and forth. We were always seen, the United States was always seen, as trying to somehow get our own spies in the Indian hierarchy, particularly in the military and in the nuclear establishment and so on. But we were viewed with suspicion. Political officers as a group were viewed with suspicion as being the people who somehow corrupted Indians. This in fact, of course, has always been a game that is played, the great game that has gone on for many years, of course, but the political section per se was not really part of this. For instance, my house had belonged to my predecessor and his predecessor for a number of years. The theory was that we were very close - well, we were within a mile and a half or two miles of parliament building. Therefore, if anyone could get the members of Parliament over for lunch, it would be us, so we had this house which was very close to the embassy. This house was watched constantly. There was a member of the intelligence who ran a little bicycle repair shop across the street and who would occasionally come over and ask to get the names of the guests and certainly wrote down every license number and so on. In those days we did not have gate guards. Later in my tour we did, but he would come over occasionally and open the gate. The real reason, of course, was to find out who was coming in and out of it. So we were very closely watched, and I was watched everywhere I went in country, as were the other members of the political section. I remember one time being out in Allahabad and the local person from the intelligence community actually escorted us around town on sort of a motorbike. He drove through town, but he insisted on sitting in on all of the appointments also, or he would find a way to get into them - let's put it that way - if not in the room, then in the outer room, and you could be sure that he heard every word.

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*Q: It really does sound much more like a police state. You're giving me not a positive face to that.*

HECK: Oh, I don't mean to do that, but India changed a great deal beginning a few years later. India is a democracy. It's just a different kind of democracy than the United States and much different from European democracy, but it's a country that has been independent now for 50 years. Of course, in those days, '35 or whatever, '36, it has never had a coup. There had been rumors, at least a rumor, that Mrs. Gandhi attempted to do that after she was obviously losing power the first time in the '70s. It never happened. The military is scrupulous about this, and I have great faith in Indian democracy, but it was a much more authoritarian kind of democracy than we had, and Mrs. Gandhi was a very authoritarian sort of a woman. You know that, as she moved into power after Lal Bahadur Shastri died in 1966, January of '66, she was placed in power by the king makers of the party because they wanted somebody pliant. They learned to their horror shortly thereafter that Mrs. Gandhi may have been the housekeeper and chatelaine for her father but she was not pliant. By the time I got there in 1983, she was very, very much in charge of the country. They all kowtowed to her tremendously in her party. She, on the other hand, was distrustful of people. She was certainly distrustful of Americans and the United States. She ran a very closely held government. She made the decisions, and often they were made on very personal reasons. I could always see in her where so many men get their opinions about women in politics or women in any sort of official position or women in a professional position. She reacted to things on a very visceral level, and personal opinions of another person's worth or non-worth got in the way sometimes of logical thought. She was something to me of a caricature of what a woman is seen as by a lot of men. In any case, she died shortly thereafter, and things changed drastically in India. She was assassinated by the Sikhs. I should say that she had caused a terrible massacre in Amritsar, which is the holy city of the Sikhs, at the Golden Temple, which is the holiest of holies. It's like having a shoot-out at St. Peter's or at the Kaaba. It is not the sort of place where one would want to have soldiers, and the Indian army was directed and did mount



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an attack there against Jarnail Bhindranwale, who was this sort of charismatic, almost Rasputin figure who was the political and religious leader of a lot of Sikhs, not of the rational, middle-ground, middle-class Sikhs, but of the people who were his followers. The problem in Punjab had been one of economy as much as anything else, and I suppose that's true of many revolutions, is it not, or insurgencies rather. But Punjab is and was a very rich farming state with a finite amount of land, and the men who were the farmers or that had some farming families were able to send their young, particularly their young men, to local colleges giving them an education. When they got out of college, there were no particular jobs for them nor was there land anymore to divide, because the land had already been divided to a fare-thee-well. So here you have a pretty well educated - this is not Princeton, but I mean educated - class and no place to go, and that's where the trouble, I think, started as much as anything. But in any case, when she ordered her troops into the Golden Temple and they got Bhindranwale, killed Bhindranwale, and a number of other followers, the die was cast and it was only a matter of time before the Sikhs got to her. They did so the following October when she was assassinated as she crossed from her private house into her office area. She was assassinated by one of her own guards, who was a Sikh. Her son and heir was at that time in the East, in the Calcutta consular area, I think actually in the Calcutta area at the time - I'll have to look that up. He was flown home immediately.

*Q: This was ...*

HECK: This was Rajiv Gandhi, and he was flown home immediately and was administered the oath of office by the President, who was a Sikh, Giani Zail Singh, but the trouble had already started. The fires were already seen around town, and several thousand Sikhs lost their lives in the following days in New Delhi as well as all over the country in various places. So once again there were lots of Sikh refugees in New Delhi living in the gurdwaras, the Sikh temples, and being cared for basically by the Sikh community although there were other organizations helping them. The difference this time - this is, I suppose, indicative of what was happening - in the past when there had been killings of

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Sikhs - and this had been going on for years - those who were killed or affected tended to be the poor. This time, as a very wealthy industrialist said to me, this time we were all targets. On the ring road, which is the peripheral road around New Delhi, cars were being stopped and Sikhs were just being pulled out and killed on the spot. This very important and wealthy Sikh businessman recounted stories of them trying to come over his wall. What had happened to some of his neighbors in an integrated, I mean the wealthy areas of New Delhi are certainly not of one religion; everybody lives together - but they were being targeted. They were being targeted by the Communist Party, it is believed by many. A certain number of members of Parliament were accused, and I think rightly so, of actually leading bands to do this sort of nefarious thing. The remains of what happened after the death of Mrs. Gandhi have been with the country for many, many years, and it's only recently, I would say, that the wounds have been somewhat healed. The distrust is always there at some level or another because of the same sorts of things that drive ethnic and religious violence in other parts of the country, as memories are long. But certainly today the situation has calmed down greatly. The Akali Dal is part of Parliament. The state is rich, Punjab is rich, the Sikhs are doing well. If there were members of the Congress Party leading demonstrations and leading mobs, it certainly wasn't the official policy of the government of the country nor of the Congress Party. So, unlike some other places I have served in, one could never say that the ruling party was part of this problem; it was not.

*Q: Prior to the assassination of Indira Gandhi, was there any of what happens in some other countries where the Indians pay quite a bit of attention to political developments and other things in the United States and get a little bit miffed, because if anything happens in India outside of the assassination of the prime minister, it's going to be on page 23 or something?*

HECK: Oh, of course, and isn't this true of most of the world?

*Q: Oh, Canadians, of course, go bananas, but I was just wondering.*

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HECK: Yes, well, first of all, when I first went to India in 1963 and when I went back in 1983, something had changed but it was still there. Certainly in the '60s India was 15 years at that point out of being a colony, and it had tremendous hang-ups and feelings of inferiority left over from the colonial experience, from the way the Indians were treated by the British, with the racial thing. Skin color, of course, matters as much in India as it does anywhere in the world despite what Indians would like to tell you about this, and you can tell this by reading the ads in the paper on Sunday that ask for white-complexioned brides because that's the highest form of praise. The darker you are, the harder it is to marry your daughters off and the more you have to pay for this privilege. In any case, when I first went to India, I can remember going into a pharmacy near where I lived and people trying to shove me to the front of the line. It wasn't because I was a woman; it was because I was a white woman. It was terrible. That had changed by the time I got to India in '83, and that was certainly a change for the better, but still there was this dichotomy about how people in general felt about the West. What they called Europeans (we were Europeans, Americans were Europeans), what they felt about color, how they treated some of my colleagues who were not white but were brown or black or yellow was a real problem. Certainly they were tremendously thin-skinned when it came to what was in the paper - I mean here in the United States. As you know, the big papers that have correspondents there full-time, like the Post and the New York Times, tend to do stories from time to time that are just sort of filler, color stories, you know, about elephants and monkeys and sadhus and so on. This really set people off, of course, because India has a huge middle class and it did even then, and there are more Ph.D.s from India in the United States doing all sorts of fantastic things in all sorts of industries than you can shake a stick at. The number of doctors and other professionals that India provides to the rest of the world is a huge one. So, of course, when you put that with all of their relatives back in India and then they hear that the New York Times is running another story on some sadhu who is sitting in a tree or whatever, of course, they tended to be mad. The stories about their politics, about Indian politics, about Indian economy very often have a feel about them which indicates that we think we're superior, and it's a problem. There are

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many things about Indian economy, of course, where we have a great deal to teach India, I think. But, yes, you're right. Of course, the Indians were very, very sensitive about what we said about them and how we wrote about it and how we showed it in the movies and newspapers and TV and so on.

*Q: How about the embassy? I wonder if you could talk about, one, who was the ambassador and how he or she operated, and then, two, often there's the feeling of those who haven't served in the area that people who serve in India get sort of India-centric and those who serve in Pakistan get Pakistan-centric. I was wondering whether this has kind of worn off or not. We're talking about the '83 to '86 period.*

HECK: Well, first of all, I had two ambassadors during that period. Harry Barnes was the first one, and the second one was John Gunther Dean. Both of them were very much professional ambassadors. Harry Barnes had served in India several times. He spoke very good Hindi. He knew a great deal about Indian politics, Indian economic things. He was concerned about human rights violations, for instance, in Punjab, and if he had to talk about that, he could do it in Hindi. He was very, very good, and because of the fact that he had served there several times, he had a long memory. He could drop things from his own past. John Gunther Dean had never served in India. However, this was his fifth embassy, I think four of them as ambassador and one as a permanent charg#, so he was most definitely one of our most senior officers. We certainly didn't lack for professional guidance from either one of them. Much depended on the larger state of Indian-American relationships. I personally feel that it's important in India to have somebody who has professionalism. However, because the country is so big and because the government feels that we have neglected them, India as a government over the course of 50 years has wanted more than anything to have an ambassador who has the ear of the White House, and this can swing. Career ambassadors don't have the ear of the White House quite as much as political ambassadors, and we've had a whole series of political ambassadors in India. Some of them who have had the ear of the White House have been there in times when we were basically cut off and there was nothing left to do but play golf. That would

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be in the late '70s, for instance. But I was certainly pleased with my ambassadors and the way they handled things.

*Q: I have spoken to John Gunther Dean about doing an oral history with him, but he's in Paris and so I haven't had a chance to do this, but I've heard from others that he was pretty authoritarian. How did you find that he ran the embassy?*

HECK: Well, I think both of the ambassadors under whom I served left a lot of the running to their DCMs, who were obviously very senior men. John Gunther Dean took no nonsense from people. If he thought you were doing a good job, he gave you a lot to do, and he was very, very helpful to me and to some others I know. On the other hand, I have seen him eat consuls general for breakfast and spit them out when he didn't like the way the man in question was handling things. So, yes, he was - and is, I suppose - somewhat authoritarian. On the other hand, any man who has had that many embassies, I guess, also has something of a right to be so. He worked very hard in India, and he certainly cultivated ministers and all the proper people. He was very professional.

*Q: Did you find any problem with some of our reporters - I won't say 'going native' is the wrong term - but getting sort of infatuated with the kaleidoscope that is India?*

HECK: Well, this goes back to the very beginning, and all sorts of ambassadors on both sides of the fence, I think, have been accused of clientitis. The so-called Delhi-wallas or India-wallas in the Foreign Service who go from several posts or have had several posts in South Asia, I don't think they are like that, because they in many cases have served in several of the countries in the region and they can look at it in a pretty professional way. But it has been a problem, yes. But is it not a problem in other countries?

*Q: Oh, yes, but I think...*

HECK: The India/Pakistan thing, though, because of the great divide, has been particularly egregious. If you have served in Pakistan very often, you see things from the Pakistani

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way. Certainly governments, administrations here in Washington, are seen as being friends of one or the other. The Democrats are seen, or have been seen, as being pro-Indian much more than pro-Pakistani, and the Republicans pro-Pakistani. I have heard political appointees in Republican administrations saying, "Well, Pakistanis are real men. They wear pants; they don't wear those diapers." Of course, the Prime Minister of India, when it was Lal Bahadur Shastri, wore a dothi and it does look like a rather large sheet, or messy diaper. But those days, I think, are somewhat behind us. Certainly after Mrs. Gandhi died and her son, Rajiv, became Prime Minister, and Rajiv saw "The foreign hand" that got behind everything.

*Q: You're raising your hand and...*

HECK: I'm raising my hand openly, because at that point in the mid-'80s a raised hand, an open hand like this, was the sign of the Congress Party, and it was on every political poster for elections that would come up if it were a Congress Party thing. The symbol of the Congress Party has changed so many times - well, there have been many of them - but at that point this was the sign, the open hand. So when Rajiv Gandhi talked about the foreign hand, he meant American usually, sometimes British, but definitely outside intervention or interference, we would laugh about it and show the open hand. But Rajiv Gandhi was a youngish, a very young, man at that point, of course. He was a very pleasant man. He was a well educated man. He didn't have the personality-type hang-ups that his mother did, and he was a welcome breath, I think, for a lot of people when he came in as Prime Minister. He had been an airline pilot. He has or had an Italian wife, and he had always said he didn't want anything to do with politics. It was his younger brother, Sanjay, who was supposed to be the politician in the family, and he made a point to let his family know that he wanted nothing to do with politics. He was only pulled into it unwillingly by his mother after his brother was killed in a - was it skydiving? It was an acrobatic thing in May of 1983, I guess, '82 maybe; it must have been May of '82. In any case, he was killed because his plane went up early in the morning and got knocked around by a monsoon. So when Sanjay was killed, she started putting pressure on Rajiv,

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and he, against his will I think, finally acquiesced, and he became her right hand. So when she was killed, he then became the leader of the party and by extension became the Prime Minister. He was, as I said, lower key, more modern. Well, he was a post-independence baby, and he didn't have the history in his mind the way his mother did of the incarcerations during the fight for independence, of the battle for independence and all the things that made Mrs. Gandhi what she was. So he was looked on hopefully by everyone, I think, not only in his party, of course, but in the various diplomatic missions around town, that this was going to be a new ballgame, and to a certain extent, I guess, it was. But he was still the leader of the Congress Party, and the Congress Party remains to this day a party of old men in many cases. So he wasn't able to just modernize everything, but he did a lot of modernization in ways that I suppose anyone living today would appreciate. He tried to bring them to use modern technology, for instance, and to become part of the 20th century, because the party itself was still sort of mired in the past. He tried to modernize the party and the government and he tried to modernize the country. The problem is, of course, that India is so huge and the party was so entrenched at that time that to do any of this is a very long-term problem. Like turning around a big tanker, it takes time and space. So when I left in 1986, he was almost two years into being Prime Minister. Things still looked very much part of the old way, but he was trying. He brought a lot of young men into the Parliament and into the office of the headquarters of the Congress Party. Some of them like Rajaish Pilot, for instance, had been one of his flying companions. There were a couple of pilots that he brought in who were like him, men in their early or mid 30s, and there was a whole series of men in their early or mid 30s whom he brought into Parliament. They were becoming increasingly important at that time when I left India in 1986. Some of them are still in Parliament.

*Q: Well, in '83 to '86 we were pretty heavily involved in supporting the Mujahideen in Afghanistan and using Pakistan as the conduit for getting equipment there and all. Did this set off nerves in New Delhi while you were there?*



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HECK: Yes, to an extent. Anything that we did in or with Pakistan was always suspect, as I have said. India was more supportive of the government of Afghanistan than certainly we or the Pakistanis were. They supported the then head of government. They had direct air transport: Indian airlines flew from New Delhi into Kabul. It was one of the few airlines that did. The Foreign Ministry was often vociferous in its support for the President of Afghanistan and the government there and of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. One of the things that we did which was very annoying to them was that we briefed the foreign press once a week on what was happening in Afghanistan. That meant not only the American representatives of the American papers but also the Indian representatives of those American papers, so very often it would be an Indian correspondent coming in to receive this briefing, it would be the person from Australian radio, it would be journalists from any of the foreign press that happened to be there, and there is a large press corps based in New Delhi which covers all of South Asia for various nations. So we would have Japanese and we would have Australians in and the Americans and representatives of American papers and so on. When I was in New Delhi, even though I was doing internal politics, I usually gave the briefing because I had been the Afghan desk officer and I had a better background and feel for these events and people than perhaps some of the colleagues who would do it normally. So for my tour I did this. In the past if anyone came down from New Delhi, from the embassy in New Delhi...

*Q: From Kabul.*

HECK: Yes, I'm sorry, came down from Kabul - that person would do it. There had been trouble in the past, as you probably remember, because George Griffin, who was the number two in Kabul for a number of years before I got there, had left his wife in New Delhi, so he would come down as often as he could. Whenever he came, of course, he had first-hand knowledge, which was even better, so the people who were in the political section at that point would always ask George to give the briefing. This redounded to his great distress later, because he was named, I think in 1982, to be the political counselor



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in New Delhi, and the Indians refused to let him come. It made a big diplomatic incident between our two countries because usually ambassadors and defense attach#s have to get "agreement." In this case the Indians refused to let him have a visa to come, and they said he would not be welcome in New Delhi, and the reason was because of this action, briefing on Afghanistan. We then, of course, in 1982 refused to let them have their choice as political counselor in Washington. It was a real tit-for-tat little thing, but it showed that the Indian government was not pleased with the briefing that we were given, because things got out of the press and they were datelined New Delhi, and this did not fit with the government of India's desire to be supportive of the government in power in Kabul.

*Q: I sort of have the feeling that during this period, and maybe before and after, in a way here is the world's largest democracy, but as far as the United States went India was sort of a null. It was kind of in the Soviet camp, kind of, in international things, so in a way there wasn't much real interest in trying to do anything.*

HECK: Well, this has been a problem since 1947 when India got its independence. The United States foreign policy switches from time to time, of course, on what is important, but the Indian subcontinent has always felt, and rightly so, that it has less than its fair share of attention from the United States government. You might say that it's because, you know, what do we need with a lot of poor people, but there are all sorts of geopolitical reasons why India has not traditionally gotten as much attention as China or Japan in Asia. Later the Tigers, the young Tigers or whatever, the Southeast Asian Peninsula as it began to grow economically became more important. Then there were always the problems in the Middle East, and there was always Europe, so this huge area didn't get its fair share. This always changes when there is tremendous violence, as a war, and always when the issue of nuclear problems comes up, and that has been a thing that has gone on. So Kashmir, fighting over Kashmir, and nuclear problems get our attention, and then, of course, as you say, these spikes when there is an assassination, for instance, or some awful calamity. But otherwise, yes, India does not get the attention it should for the number of people who live there and the potential market that it is for us. That's definitely true.

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During my period there, of course, it was still the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union was still in Afghanistan, but the Soviet Union was beginning to change. We were getting in toward the area of glasnost and perestroika. Things were switching as some of the older guard died out in Moscow, and after Rajiv came in, he decided or his government decided that India would, for instance, diversify in its procurement policy for the Indian military. So they began to look around. They weren't buying from the United States, at least by the time I left. I remember in my last year there the Republic Day parade in January - January 26th is the date when the Republic of India was decreed, not independence, that came first, but later Touk Placco. It includes military elements, and there is also a very moving beating-of-the-retreat ceremony which is truly beautiful. It lights all of the big public buildings around Rashtrepotibalwin, the President's home and the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Ministry, which flank it. In any case, there are also some military components of that, and I remember the last year the diplomats could get tickets for the rehearsals. We would go to the rehearsals of this twilight ceremony, seeing the harriers, the British - well, it's a helicopter com stoll, is it not? It can go up and down; it's a jump plane that can go up and then fly; it's a marvelous plane. They were displayed for the first time at this ceremony, which would have been in January of 1986. So India was diversifying and beginning to officially not loosen its ties with the Soviet Union but reach out to other countries. At the same time the Soviets would put tremendous amounts of effort and money into supporting the Communist parties in India and various newspapers including the Communist Party newspapers. They were beginning not to want to put all that money into the papers, so we were getting all sorts of stories about how certain daily and weekly newspapers around India were no longer getting the subsidies that they had counted upon for 35 to 40 years. They were going to be cut loose and perhaps would fall by the wayside, and in fact some of them did. Many of them did, as a matter of fact. So things were changing by the time I left, but the Russians were a tremendous presence there. They put a lot of money clandestinely and otherwise into the country. They had tremendous military connections. The military sales were actually barter sales, as I understand it, and the problem that came up for Rajiv was that India, in that period from the end of 1984 to mid-'86 when I left, really

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didn't want to take a lot of barter from Russia anymore, from the Soviet Union anymore. They didn't need it. The quality of the goods was shoddy. They were making their own. They wanted to get them from other places if they wanted them from outside, so they weren't able to sop up the barter and it was becoming a real problem.

*Q: I would have thought that there would have been a great divide between the Indian military and the Indian intellectuals and their Soviet comrades in arms or whatever you want to call them. I would have thought that because of the system - you had Brezhnev and a really lousy system...*

HECK: What was a lousy system?

*Q: The Soviet system. It was really a terrible system. The Indians are obviously astute and they have a lot of people going there and looking at it.*

HECK: Oh, absolutely. The Indian military was British in its background, its training and its ethos. The first time I was on an Indian ship in 1963, I remember being absolutely non-plussed when these officers stood up and toasted the President of India at the end of the meal, because that was what the British did. The Indian ships were British ships that they had gotten from Britain, and for whatever reason, the way they acted, the way they dressed was the way the British navy had done. The British army left its mark all over the Indian army and it's there today. They're very, very much a follow-on of the way things had been in the past. Yes, they got equipment from Russia, but they were certainly not modeled in any way, shape or form on the Russian model or the Soviet model. What they did get from the British and have to this day was the idea that they follow the leadership of the elected officials and stiff upper lip and all this, and they do it. What happened was when the civilian authority in the country wanted to buy things from the Russians (or from the Soviets), they could live with that, they could accept it. They would go to the Soviet Union and pick up a ship or something and bring it around. However, the Congress Party up until the early '80s, let's say, had a strong component that was very closely tied

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emotionally to the Soviet Union, and certainly the artistic crowd, the theater, and a number of them had the same bent, I mean ties to Russia. The Soviets were always having Indian film festivals and that sort of thing, you know, and making a big deal about it.

*Q: I would have thought that for an American diplomat there when you were not being diplomatic and having been given a rough time by the Indians on occasion, it would be great fun in a way to twit them on their close relationship with this great power to the north, you know, and all the horrible things that were going on up there.*

HECK: Well, my particular job was not to be confrontational but to learn as much as I could about the politics of the country, so I didn't do a heck of a lot of twitting, but there were others, I can tell you, who did, to varying degrees of success. As I've said before, this relationship over the course of the years has been such a roller coaster at various times. But, yes, there has always been something of a love-hate relationship there.

*Q: I would have thought something that would help also make our interest in India minor would be that they were predictable where they would stand on international things. So you couldn't count on the Indians particularly, so why worry about them in international events. Also, the fact was that they were almost a closed market, so there wasn't much trade, so we have two major things. One is trade, and the other is international influence and trying to act for whatever purpose. In both of those India wasn't playing the game.*

HECK: Well, India was playing and is playing the game by its own lights. We're just looking at this from completely different perspective. We were even then a very major - in fact, I think we were the first largest trading partner, certainly the second largest trading partner, with India. It was just not a very big market, because the country, as you say, was devoted to the idea of swadeshi, which had been laid down by Mahatma Gandhi, and it means everything being within oneself, making everything inside the country. Even today it's very hard to convince a lot of industrialists and economists that no country, no country at all, can be the best or the most efficient and therefore the cheapest in making everything and

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that, therefore, we need world trade. This is a hard concept in India even today. You're right about the hardships of dealing with India. This idea of swadeshi and government control over all of the economy is with India today. Later when I was in Sri Lanka and in Madras, which is down the line, was when Rajiv Gandhi decided to really try to open India economically. It was very interesting that at first this concept got a lot of support from a number of businessmen. There were others, particularly smaller businessmen, who fought it, because they knew that they would perhaps lose market share. The government, the bureaucrats, were the element that was most regressive about this and most likely to put the brakes on and to slow the thing down. I'm sure that John Kennedy would appreciate this, from all the things he said about the State Department, but Rajiv Gandhi and his cabinet could sit in New Delhi and make all the pronouncements they wanted to about opening the market, but a group of middle-grade people in the economic and finance ministries could really wreak havoc on that policy, and did and, I think, still do probably.

*Q: Was there any sense of frustration in the embassy by the fact that the reporting - I mean India just didn't loom very large. Here you're sitting in this huge country, and India just didn't loom very large in political decisions?*

HECK: Well, it certainly frustrated the political section. We had at that time to make a decision early on in the year about what reports we were going to send in and when. There was always the spot reporting, but we had to decide what big think pieces and what big reports on what aspects of society would be written in the following fiscal year. Basically we knew that these were going to be read in the Department of State probably by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research and by the various components of the intelligence system throughout government. Our desks were so busy with the day-to-day crisis management in Washington, the various papers that had to go to the seventh floor, talking points for various visitors, that they read summaries. They read the spot reporting because it was always something awful. A bomb had blown up or somebody was killed or so on. But these long reports over which people had slaved for months, weeks anyway, maybe the junior officer on the desk would read the whole thing and probably the director would

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glance at the summary, and that would be it. So our writing was getting just a very small number of readers, and that's frustrating when you're out there doing it.

*Q: You left there in '86?*

HECK: I left there in July of '86. May I say one thing before we go from India? One big aspect with which I was not involved but which was terribly important in the period that I was there was deciding what to do (When I said that we had Kashmir, we had the nuclear thing, and we had following some of the awful assassinations and the Akali Dal perhaps) with the money that we had. We had in that period a tremendous amount of Indian currency, and this went back to the '60s.

*Q: Counterpart funds?*

HECK: Counterpart funds left over from PL480 and so on in the early '60s when we were shipping tremendous amounts of grain in and other food items, but basically it was wheat and it was coming in through Bombay harbor; just one super large ship after another coming in. By the time that we got to the early and mid-'80s, the United States held something like, I would defer to my economic colleagues, a third of the currency of the entire nation. It was a tremendous amount of money. Now what do we do with it? We had used it for years on anything that we could buy that would be used in South Asia. We decorated libraries. We paid for people's travel back to the United States. USIA, I know, would use our counterpart funds in India to buy things in India to decorate libraries in Cairo, libraries in Tehran before the Shah fell. It was used all over the world, but it got to be such a political embarrassment and, of course, it was a tremendous problem between our country and theirs. I think it was finally settled under John Gunther Dean, but I think that it was during Harry Barnes' tour that most of it was done, and that's something that is very interesting in terms of the relationship between the two countries. We basically worked out an agreement with the government of India to share the money for a long period of time, to buy national things. By now it's all gone. There are no more counterpart

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funds, so things that we were able to finance through these funds in India and for India but for the benefit of American position in the area, it's all gone. We can't use that anymore.

*Q: Well, in '86 where did you go?*

HECK: In '86 I went directly to Colombo, Sri Lanka, where I was the political counselor. It was a very interesting time to be in Colombo. I had a four-person office, four political officers, and we were faced with two insurgencies and the country was falling apart.

*Q: Well, maybe we should do it the next time. Should we stop at this point?*

HECK: Please.

*Q: We'll pick this up when you're in Colombo. You were there from '86 to?*

HECK: To '90. *Q: '86 to '90, and we'll pick it up then. Great.*

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Today is August 24, 1998. Ernie, now once again you went to Colombo to be what?

HECK: I went to Colombo in June of '86 to be political counselor, and I was there until 1990, until the summer of 1990.

*Q: What was the situation in Sri Lanka when you arrived?*

HECK: When I arrived, the country was deep in, I guess you would call it, a guerrilla war against the liberation tigers of Tamil. Trouble had broken out in June of 1983. There had been a big funeral in Colombo. First of all, a group of soldiers had been killed, massacred, in the Jaffna Peninsula by the Tamil Tigers, who had at that point just been a sort of a local group, and they killed 20-some soldiers. The soldiers' bodies were brought back to Colombo, and there was a funeral at the major cemetery. Thousands and thousands of people went, and afterwards they rioted in the streets surrounding that and started



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attacking Tamil establishments. The trouble escalated, and for about four or five days groups just ran riot all over the island or in large parts of the island where there was a Sinhalese majority. The President, J. R. Jayewardene, stayed at his home and didn't say anything publicly. There was no call for calm on television or anything like that for four days. During those four days literally thousands of Tamils were killed, chased away, their property was burned. I think the final figure was several thousand, although I'm not sure anyone ever really knew. They were stopping cars on the main streets of Colombo and having people say something, and the groups could usually tell by an accent whether the person's first language was Sinhalese or Tamil. The Tamils got pulled out and in many cases executed in the most barbaric ways. What was even more frightening was that large groups of people went through, certainly in Colombo and in other places, armed with tax lists or property lists so that they would know which houses were owned by Tamils even if Sinhalese were living in them and vice versa. If it was a Tamil-owned house, they would burn it; and leave the people alone if they were Sinhalese. If it was the other way around where it was a Tamil renter, they'd kill the people and leave the house. It was very, very obvious that they had some help from inside. The trouble was finally quelled but not before literally thousands and thousands of people were refugees. Many of them left for India if they could get away. Many more were in refugee camps in Sri Lanka. Property was burnt all over the island. As a result, the Tamil Tigers became very strong, and this was one of the major regions, I suppose, and they became very active and pushed their fight to all of the eastern and northern provinces with very successful raids into Colombo, terrorist-type activities, bombing something usually. This was the state that it was in by the time I got there. The northern and eastern parts of the island were basically war zones. We were not allowed to travel in them. The army was in charge in those areas. The carnage, considering the small size of the population, was very, very bad, and the areas where we could travel were peppered with burnt buildings and refugees still, although most of them had by that point gone on to India and were living in refugee camps all over southern India and particularly in Tamil Nadu where they had a language in common. So it was an exciting time to be a political officer, because there was an insurgency going on, and that,



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of course, is always interesting from a political standpoint. It was interesting also - and I use the word 'interesting' advisedly - it was important to us also because there were some very bad human rights abuses apparently going on, and this, of course, was a major thrust of American policy. But as a political counselor, that was only one of my responsibilities. There was a lot of bilateral relations type things with the Foreign Ministry and so on.

*Q: Well, first, who was the ambassador, and can you describe the embassy and how it operated?*

HECK: The embassy is located on the ocean. It's a beautiful embassy with beautiful views of the sun setting over the Indian Ocean. It's on Gall Road, which is the main north-south highway which skirts the ocean from Colombo down to the southern tip of the island. My first ambassador was James W. Spain, who was an old South Asian hand who had been ambassador in several countries before that, Turkey and Tanzania specifically. This was to be his last post before retirement - a marvelous ambassador. He was followed two years later by Marion Creekmore, who had been my deputy chief of mission in New Delhi, and this was Marion's first embassy. He had been a deputy assistant secretary. He is an economist and was particularly interested in human rights - and a good ambassador, I must say, very thoughtful of people. He has now become one of the vice presidents of the Carter Center in Atlanta doing international things.

*Q: What were the major points of policy with the Sri Lanka government?*

HECK: This is an interesting point. Sri Lanka as a nation is more First World than Third World in terms of all of the quality-of-life indexes, literacy and health and length of life and all of these things, maternal and child care. It is a beautiful island filled with beautiful people. The fact that there were all of these troubles is particularly damning. In terms of American interests in Sri Lanka, on the world stage they were relatively minor. We don't have a lot of Sri Lankan American citizens. Our business interests there were minimal, because it is a small island and because other things were bigger in the region for us,

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I suppose. We didn't have a lot of citizens living there. Our major concerns were about stability of the country - it's a democracy, and we wanted it, of course, to remain that way - and the integrity of the country - we didn't want to see it bifurcated or, even worse, trifurcated - and human rights. But it was and remains not as large on the scale of things for South Asia as other countries in the region. It's dwarfed by India and Pakistan. So our leverage was good, because the Sri Lankans let it be good. It was not because we had a great deal of things to pull out or to give that would have made a great deal of difference. The embassy itself was medium small, I guess you would say. It had a large AID component, and it had a Peace Corps, but the major interests of the U.S. government were in seeing the end of this insurgency and in human rights.

*Q: How did you find just going to talk to the government? Any problems?*

HECK: Marvelous, coming from India it was marvelous. India was always a difficult place in the mid-'80s. Of course, it was not my responsibility because I was doing internal reporting there basically, but dealing with the government could be a little prickly at times, more often than not in many cases. Dealing with the Foreign Ministry could be difficult at times. To be in Sri Lanka, to be able to call up the Foreign Ministry and say, "I have something I want to talk to you about. Can I come over?" and I could be there in half an hour. I could get an appointment so easily, and I could see virtually anyone I needed to see at almost any time. The hard part about dealing with the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry was that it was so small they were overextended in many ways. They didn't have a lot of officers. There was not fat in the system particularly, and people were being switched around. In my four years there I had seven different directors, what was called Director of the Western Hemisphere, I think - it was basically everything - but the person in charge of the United States also had all of North and South America and all of Western Europe and, I think, also the various remaining colonies of Western Europe. So it was like 53 entities that it dealt with, of which the United States was only one albeit an important one.

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So having seven different interlocutors became a little bit of a game, but they were all nice people.

*Q: Did you find that you were at a certain point becoming sort of the institutional memory for them?*

HECK: Well, yes, it got a little embarrassing. You are aware of how the United States just loves to go in and tell other foreign ministries what our opinions are on everything and asking their support to follow our lead on whatever the issue is. A big country can afford to do that. A country like Sri Lanka, they would listen politely, but most of these issues didn't matter to them. Their one issue at that point was, first of all the Tamil Tigers, or rather the Tamil insurgency because when I got there the Tamil Tigers was one of six groups but it soon became the remaining one of the six groups - it removed its competition, let us say, in some pretty violent ways - and then later the JVP. That's the Jene Vemut de Peremuna, which is people's liberation. There was a Maoist group on the other side of the spectrum. It was Sinhalese people from the deep south basically. When it got into the fray, the only thing that mattered to the Sri Lankan government was gaining support for its position against these terrorist or insurgency groups and very little else. So particularly the day I would have to go in in the fall and present the American position at the United Nations and you have 45 different subjects to cover, it got to the point where you could just see the eyes glazing over, but they were quiet about it.

*Q: It may be a peripheral issue, but I was wondering whether you got involved in narcotics, because my wife's best friend's daughter married a Sri Lankan down in Miami who was involved in drugs, and I understand that Sri Lankans, the ones that were down in that area, were involved in the trade. Was there a problem?*

HECK: Yes, we did, although it was trans shipment, as far as I know, and nothing else. The DEA office in New Delhi covered us and came down periodically. One of my officers - I say one of my officers, we were a three-person, one-secretary unit, so this is not a

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large organization - but one of the other political officers was responsible for narcotics. What that usually meant for us was funneling stuff from DEA to the narcotics people in the Sri Lankan police and vice versa, but occasionally we had an informant. We would get an informant, and we would get in touch immediately with DEA, and they would usually come down and relieve us of this responsibility. So there was an interest, although it was not nearly so big for the DEA office in New Delhi, as was the Pakistan-Afghanistan-India conduit. As far as I know, there was no making of anything in Sri Lanka; it was just a trans-shipment issue. The Tigers were using this as one of their ways of getting money, so it was of vital importance to them.

*Q: In the first place, let's take the Tigers and then move to...*

HECK: The JVP.

*Q: The JVP, but the Tigers first. What was our view of them? Were we trying to act as an intermediary or were we trying to get information about them? Did we have any particular concern about them other than wishing well for the...*

HECK: For the Sri Lankan government. No, we were not an intermediary in any sense. In the early '80s, shortly after this vast riot across the country in '83 summer - I'm just trying to remember, it must have been '85, because George Bush was involved, and he was in India in 1985 - up till then we still had in the north some AID people. One of the groups - and I don't remember at this point whether it was the Tigers or one of the others - kidnapped a bunch of our AID people, five or six including some spouses. They didn't harm these people; they just held them. I just remember that George Bush was involved in a phone call, as I remember, when he was India down to Sri Lanka about this, which is how I think I can date it. After that, of course, we pulled out whatever remained of our AID people. The northern peninsula, Jaffna Peninsula, was first settled by Tamils a couple thousand years ago. They have been on the island a long, long time. They are, therefore, more like cousins rather than brothers to the Tamils in India. There is particularly in the

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Jaffna area, which is on the far northern part, or was before all the trouble started, a lot of cross-strait transport. People would go over to India to watch a movie, for instance, and this sort of thing. Well, they don't do that anymore. And there were marriages in the far north between that part of India and Sri Lanka. But basically they evolved somewhat differently from the people in Tamil Nadu. Their language is different enough that Tamils know the difference immediately. It's like British English and American English. But they lived in this region all this time. When the British got to Sri Lanka, not too far behind them were American missionaries in the first half of the 19th century. The United States was, of course, big on converting the "heathen," and why they thought that people who had had the same religion for several thousand years were heathen is another question, of course. But when American missionaries came to Sri Lanka, as they did, the British hierarchy in Colombo basically sent them to the Jaffna Peninsula. They maintained for themselves the more fertile area along the coast and the richer area, the Sinhalese area, and the church of choice at that point was the Church of England, of course. The Americans, therefore, were sort of exiled out there on that far northern thing, and they did something very good for that part of the country, but it also led to the troubles later in a way. It was education, and hospitals to a certain extent, but education particularly. They opened schools and colleges, and they taught English. So there has been that special tie between the United States and Sri Lanka particularly among mission boards going back 150, almost 200 years now. For instance, John Foster Dulles' great grandmother, one of his maternal relatives, is buried in Jaffna, and when we finally were able to go there, Ambassador Spain laid a wreath on the church wall where the plaque was about this person. So the connections have been high up there, but, no, we did not get involved in trying to do anything about it. Quite the contrary, among the Tamils who are in the United States, whether citizens or permanent residents, there was definitely following the 1983 troubles a move to send money, and particularly the Tigers but other groups also milked the community in the United States and Canada for financial support to help the struggle. I do not know whether this continues or not. But in any case, when I was there in the second half of the '80s, memories were still very, very raw about what had happened, and it was a great tragedy

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what had happened in 1983. The Tamil people, I think, as a whole basically at that point, and certainly in the Jaffna Peninsula, supported the Tigers, at least passively if not actively. I would say that by the time I left this had changed. There was a good deal of resentment about what had happened. Anyway, to go back to the education, if I may just finish that, the point is that the Americans taught English and gave a good education, and then these people became the people of choice for British civil servants' jobs. They became the baboos, they became the clerks. They had a much higher percentage of jobs in the central government than did the Sinhalese for their population. What transpired from all of this was in the '50s when S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike became Prime Minister, he lived in Sinhalese-dominated areas, and so they spoke at least some Sinhalese, but they were not of the educational level normally to work in government, so it basically took a major source of employment away from the Tamils in a very short order. That was one of the great injustices, as the Tamils see it, that precipitated some of the troubles later in the '70s and '80s. But going back to the American effort in the north; we tried to protect our citizens as best we could, but there really wasn't anything we could do about it other than to keep in touch with them, and even that was difficult because mail didn't go and telephones didn't work, to the north. The government had, by the time I got there, long since cut off any shipments of gasoline, so no cars ran in the north. Whatever there was went to the Tamil Tigers, and the cars were all in storage. There was no electricity. In the northern part of the island, these very educated, sophisticated people were living in most cases with no electricity and no gas, and the Tamils wouldn't let them out of the region. They were forbidden to cross over. Some of them did come, of course, but basically they were captive in their own region. The damage done by the Sri Lankan military at various points had really wreaked havoc on things like the university and the major buildings in town. Some of it was imposed by the Tamils fighting back. I mean, this was not a one-way street. But the conditions up there were not at all good. We did a weekly cable, the D&D for Death & Destruction, of terrorist incidents and fighting throughout the island. The statistics were just horrendous, you know. First of all, it was hard to know what to believe. You could take things from the newspaper, but you couldn't go out and see these incidents

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yourself obviously. We couldn't go into the northern and eastern province, and so we developed quite a list of contacts, the three of us. We really worked the crowd trying to find out things from people in the military and civilians. There was still a modicum of central civilian rule, administration rather, in the northern and eastern provinces. There was an official assigned by the government to be in charge of each of those two provinces just as there was in the seven to the south. We would see them when they came to town, and we would try to see their senior people when they came to town. They could go back and forth, because they could fly on the Sinhalese government or the Sri Lankan government military planes. There was one base up there on the Jaffna Peninsula at a place called Palali which the army held and where there was a runway, so the planes did go back and forth, and so we could see these people. We would talk to Tamil politicians in Colombo who were out of the mainstream but still had family ties and had some ways of getting in touch with each other. The hard part was how many of these were lost, how many people were killed who had been friends of ours, acquaintances of ours, sources of ours, informants of ours. Of course, it only got worse when the JVP insurgency started a couple of years later. The last time I counted, I think I had lost 47 people who had been killed, whom I had entertained in my home, whom I had thought of as important people for me for various reasons.

*Q: Now, these were on both sides?*

HECK: These were on all sides.

*Q: I take it that the insurgency was not confined to the peninsula, and things were happening...*

HECK: They were blowing things up in town. I can remember waking up with big booms. I remember one horrendous boom, and it was the railway tracks coming into town that they had knocked out. Elephant House, the big supply store where we all bought our soda water and that sort of stuff, got blown up. The tried different buildings around town.



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They tried assassinations, and they got a certain number, but they were not as active in Colombo at that point as later the JVP became.

*Q: What was our estimate or anybody's estimate of what were the Tamil Tigers after?*

*HECK: They wanted independence, as their name said. They wanted a separate country for the northern and eastern province. At various time in the intervening years when the government had tried to make some sort of negotiations with these people, there were whispers or thoughts about greater autonomy, never independence but greater autonomy for the region. I'm not sure where it's going to go. I heard a minister, whom I had known before he was a minister, speak several months ago, and he was talking then about they were waiting for the Tigers to respond to the latest offer by the current Prime Minister, Mrs. Humarna Tunga. But it was independence that they were after. These were fanatic young men. The leader, Prabhakaran, must be in his 40s now, but in his mid-30s then. He demanded total loyalty of these young men who worked for him, and actually there were young women brigades also. They had military training, even the girls. They are noted for their devotion to the cause. They all wear a little cyanide capsule around their necks and, believe me, they use them when they are cornered, a number of them did so while I was there. When they say, "Bite the bullet," this was really biting the bullet. Going by cyanide is not a nice way to go. But it does take care of your turning over any information to the other side. They were getting even then kids that were just barely adolescents. You must have seen pictures of little boys holding automatic guns, and the guns are just as big as they are. That doesn't stop them, of course, from being able to cause some damage. Their complete willingness to die for the cause is what sets them apart from the army. Conscripts in an army are not so good, particularly in an army that doesn't have the luxury of tremendous training and doesn't have the equipment. So I would say that the Tigers had and probably still have the edge on the Sri Lankan army. The Sri Lankan army, on the other hand, is now better trained and is now better equipped and probably is a lot better than it was when I left Sri Lanka. These groups were bringing weapons in. They would buy weapons with the money that they collected, in Singapore usually, I*

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*think, or in Southeast Asia, and bring them in by ship. There were plenty of Tamils working for shipping companies. There were plenty of Tamil captains. One heard of ships that were supposed to belong to the Tamil Tigers. I don't know if they ever did, but they would land at night off the coast somewhere and ferry stuff in in small boats, and it would go into the arsenal. They even had a few missiles, surface-to-air missiles, SAMs. I think they have brought a couple of small planes down since I left, but they hadn't by the time I left. Anyway, the difference between the northern and eastern provinces is important to note, because the northern province really is entirely Tamil. I can remember meeting one journalist who was a Sinhalese who lived up there, and there were the missionaries who refused to leave, but basically it is entirely Tamil. The eastern province, on the other hand, is not. It's a mixture. There are Sinhalese populations, large ones. The Tamils are the largest of the three, but there are a number of Muslims also and different kinds of Muslims. Islam came to Sri Lanka in different fashions, so there are several different Muslim groups. They were represented on the eastern province, so it wasn't such a cut-and-dried proposition about the eastern province. The trouble there was just as bad as in the north and maybe even worse. The army seemed to be more in the northern province, and it has gone back and forth since then. At this point now in 1998 apparently the eastern province is much more in government hands than it ever was when I was there, but I could never go to any of the beauty spots on the eastern coast. This is where Trincomoly is. This is the huge base where the British fleet could put its entire fleet in.*

Q: *Very, very important during World War II.*

HECK: That's right. I couldn't go there, couldn't go to Badakolol, the other major town in the region, couldn't go anywhere in the eastern province. I got only as far as the jungles along the border and never further east. To go to Jaffna, even though this was such an important part of what we were watching, I was only there twice. Once was in 1987, November of '87, when the Indian army pushed its way into Sri Lanka. The government had to bite its tongue and accept this, because it was India and it was huge and it had ships off the coast. You could see the lights of the Indian picket ships along the sea at

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night, and it had the air power, it had all the striking capability that Sri Lankans didn't. It was going to protect the Tamils from what the Sri Lankan army was doing to them. They came in the summer, July, I guess, of 1987. Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister, came down. There was a guard of honor, and one of the guard of honor tried to assassinate him right in front of the President of Sri Lanka, and the Prime Minister. He had a glancing blow on the head, as I remember, but he was not badly hurt. The man was, of course, caught and turned out to be a chauvinistic Sinhalese who didn't like the idea of the Indian occupation of his country. The Indian army moved rapidly into the north and the east, and in August or so of 1987 the diplomatic corps was invited to come up or at least was told that they could come up to Jaffna. I accompanied the ambassador, and we went up for about a total of four days, calling on people, meeting people, meeting the Indian army, and then driving back. It was a very interesting trip. The thing that interested me the most was when we went in to call on the I think he was a brigadier who was in charge of the operation in Jaffna city itself. Seated on his veranda of this colonial building in which he had been ensconced were some of his troops. I remember a Sikh enlisted man fixing Tamil Tiger radio equipment, repairing the Tiger capability to speak to one another. Things were all very friendly at first when the Indian army went in. This lasted until October.

*Q: Excuse me. While we're talking about the Indian move in there, in the first place, could you talk a bit about just before they came in, our relations and our embassy and your relations with the Indian embassy there, and then when they came in, how we reacted to this, what we thought they were up to, and what we did?*

HECK: Well, the Indian intelligence service had been training various groups of Tamil insurgents for many years, some of them in the south in Tamil Nadu. They had camps and training sites, and some in the north up in Beridudin in the foothills of the Himalayas. It was a pretty open secret that Indira Gandhi had put some of her government's resources behind protecting the Tamils. First of all, I should say that this event in the summer of 1983 shocked Indian public opinion. It really was upsetting and, of course, it was particularly upsetting in the south where Tamil Nadu is located, the state of Tamil Nadu. I believe

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that public opinion in India, such as it was at the time, would have supported what the Indian government was doing, but the Indian government did try to keep it relatively quiet. But it was no big secret, and certainly the journalists wrote about it and occasionally a few surreptitious pictures were taken. The Indian government had the deniability factor behind it, so they were able to get away with it. But there were these ties. Prabakharan had gone up and talked to Rajiv Gandhi when he was Prime Minister, and the Indians had tried to talk them into various types of things. Prabakharan was not particularly happy and wasn't buying much of this stuff. The Indians tried some strong arm on them, and it was not particularly useful, but by the time the Indians arrived in Sri Lanka, they had built up public opinion at home that they needed to do this to protect the Tamil populace. At first they were seeing them as welcome brothers when they got into the north and east, but it didn't last very long. First of all, Prabakharan, I think, was still seething over having this done to him. They had a very big ceremony that the Indians played up tremendously early on when they first got there, a surrender ceremony of weapons. They had this big public ceremony in Jaffna where various members of the Tigers and others came and deposited weapons. They collected the most motley group of things. It wasn't a very big group, first of all, and it was nothing. It was just Enfields and things like this that were probably dug out of somebody's basement as much as anything else, if there are basements - I don't think there are in Jaffna. But anyway, it was obviously not their weapons. This was a symbolic gesture on the part of the insurgents, but not a real thing. Well, the honeymoon was over very soon. Part of it was that the Indian army really aren't brothers with the Sri Lankan Tamils. First of all, the Indian army is very, very diverse, and the units that came in were from all over the country and they were not Tamils and they didn't speak the language. This meant that at road checks they couldn't communicate unless the person involved was an educated person and they could use English. But a lot of the Indian enlisted men didn't really have a lot of English. They had some, of course, but it was not conducive to long discussions about what's in the basket, so it got a little bit hairy. Along about the second week in October of that year, the Tamil Tigers started sniping at the Indian army. From then on until the Indian army pulled out - and the last groups didn't go until 1990, I believe

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- it was a constant battle, and it became really open warfare. The Indians became the enemy instead of the Sri Lankan army basically, and the Sri Lankan army was basically told to leave this alone and the Indian army would take care of it with their superior fire power and all of their weapons. Of course, they did have a lot better weaponry, and they had a disciplined force, but they're not a guerrilla fighting organization. They didn't know the terrain, they didn't know the language, and they didn't really do very well.

*Q: Did you kind of feel like it was deja vu all over again?*

HECK: All over again, yes.

*Q: From your time in Vietnam?*

HECK: Well, yes, in a way, because, for instance, when we went up that year, that August, Ambassador Spain and I, I remember being taken to a church, and the Tamils were just livid because the church had been bombed. The word 'bombing' got thrown around a lot in Sri Lanka, but what was being used as bombs were makeshift. I think it was a yak, the plane, that was used. It's a Chinese plane. They use them occasionally for paratroops. The one I rode in I remember had the paratroop wire across the top. The bombs were barrels, they were old oil barrels with inflammatory material. They would push holes in them and light it and push it out of the plane. That was the bomb. It set fire to the roofs, but it was not a bomb in the military sense. India, on the other hand, has things that are really bombs, and they have airplanes and they have all of the equipment. So, it became very much like Vietnam, a smaller version, it was the Indian's Vietnam. Like us in Vietnam, they never really quite understood why these people they were trying to help weren't more grateful. It got very nasty at the end because the Tigers could get old ladies to carry things up and explode them. They could draw on a variety of people in the population, and the Indians just really weren't used to taking out after little old white-haired ladies. It became a really nasty thing. The Indians also had the problem of pulling out. First, I should go back a bit. You asked about India and its role. India saw itself, by the time I got there in 1986, as

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in charge as much as any country could be in charge among the diplomatic corps. The then ambassador was J. M. Dixit, and Mr. Dixit, who is also called Manny Dixit, ended his career as Foreign Secretary, which, of course, is the highest professional rank in the Indian Foreign Ministry. He was a very erudite man who could recite couplets in Urdu even though he was from the far south, an extraordinarily active and energetic diplomat. I remember the first week I was in town being invited to attend a Rotary Club luncheon by a Sri Lankan friend. We trotted off to this Rotary Club luncheon, and the speaker was Manny Dixit. He proceeded to read this Rotary Club the riot act about the failings of the Sri Lankan government and their failings with the Sinhalese. It was a real talking-to, a real Dutch-uncle-type thing. It was not a pleasant lunch conversation. This man had no fear when it came to lecturing Sri Lankans about India's point of view. Although I never sat in on one of his meetings with the Prime Minister or the President, I suspect it was along this same line. He was a very direct person. After the Indian military came, the Sri Lankan government was faced with the fact that the Indians wanted to really solve the problem, as well they might, and the Indians began a peace negotiation. As far as I remember, at that point it was just with the Tamil Tigers, but they did keep the Sri Lankan government informed. The team that was involved in this was Ambassador Dixit, he was a high commissioner, because it was a commonwealth country - the High Commissioner of India who was Manny Dixit, his political officer, who was also hand picked by him for this job. There were long and very detailed talks in the Jaffna Peninsula area. The High Commissioner would go up quite regularly for these. It was announced jointly by the Sri Lankan government and the Indian government, but this was the Indians which had done this - that an agreement had been worked out with Prabakharan which would bring him into government. This would make him and his Tamil Tigers part of, or actually in charge of, the government of the northern and eastern provinces. He would have a year that way, and then after one year there would be some sort of a referendum to decide what the people wanted. I was over at the Indian High Commission that day for something else, and they were so excited. My contact, the political officer, was on the phone to Delhi and consulting with the ambassador. They were in constant touch with New Delhi about

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this, and they were so pleased about it, and it was announced that evening at five or five-thirty. It was on all the evening news. Before dawn Prabhakaran had called and reneged. He called up Manny Dixit in the middle of the night and said he wasn't going to do it. I could never figure this out, because I always thought that, given the way things run in that part of the world, if the Tigers had been in charge of the government of those two areas for one year, they would have had it. I think it was our first real indication that this man, Prabhakaran, really is not interested in governance. He is a guerrilla, and I don't think he really wanted to have the headaches of feeding the people and all these other things. So that was over, and in later times, in fact again in 1990, the Sri Lankan government tried the same thing. At that point the Tigers came down to Colombo, and we had the really strange experience in 1990 of having the number one or two person in the Foreign Ministry from the professional side calling the embassies and asking them to come see the Tigers, making appointments for us to be present at this. They were trying then to work out some sort of an agreement, and the Tigers backed away again, and since then they've done it a third time, and maybe a fourth, I don't know. It's pretty apparent that these people, at least the hierarchy, are not interested in governance. What they would do with independence I have no idea.

*Q: When the Indians moved in there, this is the sort of thing that normally we would protest about. Here is India forcing their way into another country. It would be the sort of thing that I would have thought that we would have reacted in some way.*

HECK: To the best of my knowledge we did not. It's possible in New Delhi - I do not remember though - certainly not in Colombo. First of all, living in Sri Lanka gave me an idea about how people in Central America and Mexico feel about the United States. A small country next to a giant faces a certain amount of things, and perhaps as a giant we understood this, I don't know. We certainly did want peace, and if the Indians could bring peace, that was all for the good. In any case, the trouble in the north dragged on. It became worse and worse as the Indians realized that they really had an enemy here and not a friend. When the new president was elected in Sri Lanka in 1988, R.



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Primadosse succeeded J. R. Jayewardene, and R. Primadosse had been J.R.'s prime minister. Unlike J.R. and the previous prime ministers of the country, R. Primadosse was really a man of the people. He was from a very, very low socioeconomic group and low caste. His education was not good. He was not a sophisticated type. J.R. was very, very sophisticated, and I have heard that he and his brother used to speak Latin to each other just to keep in practice. He was and remains quite a man. R. Primadosse was much more of a politician and had his finger much more on the pulse of the people. He made as one of his campaign pledges and ultimately carried it out that the Indian government was going to have to pull its troops out. He couldn't force them out, but it happened. So over the period after he was made President in 1988 or '89, they started pulling troops back and finally pulled out the last of their troops sometime in 1990, I believe, doing it all by sea, whereas they had flown them in in large contingents. Coming out was a lot slower, as they took them out by boats. One of the things that happened because of the Indian presence, which was such anathema to so many people in the country, was the resurgence of the JVP. There had been a JVP insurgency in the mid-'70s which was very bloody, ultimately controlled but very bloody. It was short but it was very nasty in the early '70s. After that point the organization had been basically underground, and the tenor of it had changed. The leader of the JVP was a man named Rehana Wujiwira, and he was from the very deep south. His father had been an ardent Communist. He had been sent to school at Patrice Lumumba University in the Soviet Union and, in fact, was expelled from Patrice Lumumba for being too revolutionary. He was not a Russian Communist; he was a Maoist of the Cultural Revolution type; Maoists with a really strong nationalistic, chauvinistic bent. The original JVP in the '70s had been university students in large part. They were doing this for an ideological reason and they understood what the ideology of this organization was supposed to be, which was something of a mismatch - nationalistic, chauvinistic, anti-foreign, anti-this, anti-that. The JVP began to appear in the mid-'80s - it actually had been doing a little bit of harm but relatively minor things, not to cause trouble and not to get headlines in the papers but not enough to scare the population in its entirety - this JVP was made up of a different type of person. When S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike had



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instituted his language policy in the '50s, one of the things was, of course, that schools had to be in Sinhalese, and yet the elite universities in the country continued to teach largely in English. Part of it is just economic. You know, writing science texts in Sinhalese can be very difficult at the university graduate level. Many of the students were doing all English except for maybe a little bit of Sinhalese. The newer schools in the far south, which weren't very good in the first place, would be teaching in Sinhalese, and there were nationwide exams to get into colleges. These bright kids who could speak only Sinhalese could only get into these schools, and what they could learn would be either Sinhala or Polli, which was the previous language from which Sinhalese was derived. So what do you do with a degree in Sinhalese or Polli? Well, you'd be a school teacher in a primary school out in the sticks somewhere and you make zero money and you have zero prestige and you don't have a chance at the big apple which is tourism. In tourism you've got to speak a foreign language, right? Where the money was in the country was not where they were. They were the semi-educated have-nots. That was the market from which this JVP got its membership: blue-collar workers, policemen, people like this who felt very strongly about Indian presence in their country but didn't really feel that they had any stake in the government of the country. The third thing was that there was a strong Buddhist component. They were very Buddhist in nature in many cases, and so there was a certain fear about who might be hiding among the monks, of whom there are a great number. This group only really became part of the forefront after the Indian process, and it grew like wildfire. It was all over the island in a very short time, or at least all over the non-northern and eastern provinces. Even worse than the Tigers, it was at that point a very violent organization aimed at bringing down the government. As such, anyone could be fair game, but especially supporters of government, particularly civil servants, high-ranking civil servants, politicians, particularly from J. R. Jayewardene's party. He was seen as the traitor who had brought in the Indians and so that meant the NP Party. They were fair game, and their family members were fair game. People's homes would be broken into at night, and they would be slaughtered under some pretty awful circumstances. Burning tires, what are called mekosin in South Africa, was a common thing. They'd try to get the

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bodies off the road before daylight, but you would see the circles where the tire had burnt along the roadside. The deaths got heavier and heavier and nastier and nastier. Extortion, coming to people's homes and demanding money to leave them alone: large amounts of money went to the JVP coffers that way. There were raids on army outposts or police outposts to get weapons. Their reach was far and it was into Colombo a lot more than the Tamil Tigers who could come in and bomb. These people were everywhere. It was a very, very scary time, and it got worse and worse, embassy employees' families getting dragged into this occasionally, and the Sri Lankan military reacting with great harshness. So what the military was doing made some of the human rights violations on the north and east even worse, because now they were doing it all over the island. People disappeared, tremendous numbers disappeared, never seen again. I'm sure that there are unmarked graves all over the island even now, although, as I said, the military really has cleaned up its act in the last few years. For the American community, we had an American school which was located quite a distance from downtown out on the edge of town, actually in the part of town that the government wanted to build up, and they built a new university out at this place. They had built some ministries, and the idea was that things would move out that way. Anyway our school sat out there, and part of our school got destroyed. They actually were trying to burn down the ministry next door. I guess that would have been in '87 or '88. We had to open quite late and lost a lot of our library. We started putting an employee on the bus, the school buses that picked up the children, with a walkie-talkie so that she could be in touch with the Marines. Occasionally they would see a body or something on the road. It could be a traumatic time for many of the children. I remember once - I'm not sure I want this in the oral history - we invited the regional psychiatrist down to talk to the children. It turned out that the regional psychiatrist's experience had been in prisons. He was not the person to talk to these impressionable little kids. He was not warm and fuzzy, let's put it that way. I remember parents being terribly upset about that. In any case one got very inured to things that went boom and shooting at night. Of course, we had curfews all the time. It was a good place to save money, because basically in my last two years there until my last maybe five months, but the previous two years curfew had

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been anyplace between six and nine at night. You had to get special permission to go to the airport. There were lots of roadblocks, lots of paper being exchanged, and so on - a scary time. I lived very close to both one of the television stations and what used to have been the racetrack. One of the PMs, I think it was Bandaranaike, closed the racetrack because they decided gambling was bad for people. It still stood there big and tall, and it was used to house soldiers, who apparently camped on the field. You weren't allowed anywhere close to it. There was a great deal of barbed wire around it. I would lie there in bed at night and listen to gunfire, and then the next morning I would try to find out what had happened, and, of course, it didn't happen. Once there was a very big fight. The JVP was trying to get into the TV station. There was quite a fire fight, and, you know, nobody would admit it the next day. It's very hard to keep it a secret. I mean lots of us heard it, and we ultimately found out what it was. There were stories of killing prisoners at the racetrack. You'd hear shooting at night, and it was supposedly assassinations. As the trouble got worse, the Sri Lankans became more aggressive. By spring of '89 many of us were really beginning to wonder if the government might not fall. We thought that the JVP and the fear of the JVP were strong enough that the government might indeed collapse and the Sri Lankan body politic would just fall apart and the JVP "win." They were so anarchist in their nature, we couldn't imagine what would happen then, because as far as anyone could tell, there was no plan for what would come next but there was just this great desire to bring it all down like a house of cards. Well, as that began to really come home to everybody, the Sri Lankan government by this time was under Premadasa. Perhaps they were even there before, but they certainly became strong under him. Basically a counterforce dressed all in black went out at night with masks covering their faces and assassinated suspects left and right. They were involved in a lot of disappearances of journalists. Journalists who wrote about what was happening tended not to last very long. The river that was just out of town between the city and the airport would have bodies floating down it every morning. We just got inured to it. It was just there. It was terrible. In fact, one of the people who worked in my house lost some first cousins who were murdered by these people, and they were Tamils. They had nothing to do with this, but this is how the organizations like this,

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which really run under their own authority and are only very loosely connected to the army per se, operate. The point at issue on this particular squad was, I guess you would call it, marital jealousy. The major who was in charge of this particular squad, his wife had left him and had married, or at least was living with, a Swiss man. They had with them the child of the major, who had gone with his mother. He was about eight. The Swiss man was taking his family back to Switzerland for the holidays, so they were packing up, and there was a party that night to say goodbye to him at his home. The Tamil who worked for me had two cousins who were working in this house as servants. Like a lot of parties in Sri Lanka, if there was a party, everybody stayed overnight because you couldn't go home after dark. So at eleven o'clock or something, well part curfew, this group of masked men in their black uniforms with their automatic weapons burst in. They took the two Tamil boys, and the next day they were found with their hands tied behind their backs. They had been executed on the beach under one of the big tourist hotels. It was simply to scare (it turned out later or at least this is what we were told because nobody was punished), it was meant to scare this woman and this Swiss man. He didn't want these people to take the boy out of country, and that was at the bottom of it. Now why they didn't kill the Swiss man, I do not know, but they chose to kill the two servants instead. You heard stories like this relatively regularly.

*Q: If the JVP was a sort of a Maoist movement, why weren't Americans the target?*

HECK: You know, we never could figure that out. We were very concerned about this. We tightened security. We did not send families away. But, believe me, the embassy spent a lot of time on that issue. Why weren't we and other foreigners the targets? The only targets were the Indians. The Indians, of course, had to be very, very careful, the Indian High Commission people. There was a bomb once across the fence, but it was just a little one, at the India High Commission, which by that time sat right next door to AID mission, so there was some concern at the AID mission, but it was not directed at us. It was directed at the Indians. No, we did not have an answer to that. I believe that a few Indians were in fact killed but not a lot. There were Indian businessmen and first-generation or second-

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generation Indians in Colombo who, I suppose, the JVP would consider as outsiders. There was down in the south central area someplace a big plantation which was being run with Indian management, and they, as I remember, killed a group, nine of them or something, men and women who were living on this plantation running whatever, the rubber plantation or tea - it must have been tea.

In any case, as I said, this group of I guess you would call them paramilitary - anyway, in addition to things like this little story I just told you, they hunted down members of the hierarchy of the JVP, which was very secret. People knew the name of Rohan Wujiwira in charge. Nobody knew really what he looked like anymore, and nobody knew where he was. The Sri Lankans knew that there was a politburo of sorts with, I think, seven members. I'm not even sure they knew at that point how many members. They weren't even sure who all those people were. There were lists, but I'm not sure that anyone could be absolutely certain about this. The authority was given to a particular brigadier general to go out and get these people, and he proceeded to start to do that. It was not a pretty sight. They captured several of them individually. Strangely enough, they were always killed trying to escape. Finally, in late November of '89, they actually cornered Rohan Wujiwira, the leader, who strangely enough was killed trying to escape. It collapsed at that point. It just imploded. Little bits and pieces were left, but for the whole organization that was the coup de grace. One of our big things, as I said, was human rights and we did an awful lot of talking to human rights organizations - there were a few, a couple - and to various NGO groups, Sri Lankan or foreign, who worked in the countryside trying to get a handle on what was happening on the ground as well as the human rights issues. All of this was so patently false. Nobody stood up and said anything about it. Everybody was so relieved it was over. The human rights people never publicly, as far as I know, ever under any circumstances made any noises about this obviously fake everybody-dying-while-trying-to-escape routine. They were executed. But everybody was just so relieved that it was over. So many people had had to leave the island. The middle class was in absolute torment. The banking system had fallen apart. I mean, the whole country was torn up, and

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everybody was just relieved that it was over. So, people tried to just forget it, you know, and start to move on with their lives. It took a little while for the JVP to die out entirely. The army then started in with a vengeance trying to round them up, and they probably killed or caused to disappear a number of totally innocent or mostly innocent people. To be in the south at that point as a young country boy was to be suspected in many cases of being one. The most egregious, most awful thing - and this did get some cries of horror, was sort of the final blow on the very far south on the coast at a major intersection. The road was basically along the coast all the way from Colombo clear over to where it ran into a jungle national park on the far southeastern corner of the country. It skirted the water. Where that road intersected with a road that went north-south into the tea plantation areas, one morning toward the end of January of 1990, the army had had a round-up. This particular man in charge down there was a major, and later promoted to colonel as his reward by R. Premadasa, who was secretly very pleased with this, I guess. People got up that morning, and there were 24 heads of JVPers stuck on the spikes of this fence that was across the sea road from where the north-south road came in. We were right back to the Middle Ages at this point.

*Q: Well, it does seem that within the society that it didn't take much to strip away the veneer of what we would call - I'm not sure 20th century but - niceties. They seemed to almost run amok or the equivalent thereof.*

HECK: This was a very scary time, and I would hesitate to be too harsh in my criticism, because I was able to feel the fear. I was afraid. Everybody was afraid. This was a very, very dicey time. We were not dealing with an army that might lock people up as prisoners of war. I mean by that the insurgents. We were dealing with people who would kill anything in sight and no questions asked. Prisoners weren't taken. So I don't want to be too harsh about it. Certainly not all of the Sri Lankan military did this, not by any stretch of the imagination. But harsh measures were needed, and ultimately they were taken, and I found that interesting.

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*Q: Did you find that there weren't the attention of international press coming down all the time or human rights groups which have focused on East Timor and other places? It seems to move around the spotlight, and the spotlight didn't...*

HECK: The spotlight didn't touch it as much as it should, because pound for pound, person for person, that was a very violent island in the four years I was there, and there was a tremendous amount of death and tremendous destruction of all sorts. But it's rather small, it's out of the way. Although the number of refugees grew, the Tamils particularly had gone abroad. There were big Tamil contingents in Europe as well as coming to North America, more to Canada than the United States, of youngish people, young boys that families wanted to get away from this. Very often the more educated families would fit right in and sort of disappear into society as a whole. Then there would be these younger, less educated, poorer, very often what we called Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka, which meant they were from those who had come to Sri Lanka in the 19th century as indentured labor. They were always poor. They were always less educated. They were the poorest of the poor in Tamil Nadu who had been rounded up by the Brits and shipped off there in the 19th century. They started out from a much lower socioeconomic base, and they ended up waiting tables in Germany. Germany particularly because of its laws, because each state its own, as you know, about refugee status. It was a relatively easy place in those days for them to get in if they could claim asylum. On their first stop in Germany, they usually stayed for a long time. A lot of Sinhalese did not leave permanently. If they had the money, suddenly it became the time to take a six-month trip to London to see cousin Betty who was living there, or something like that. It was a time to lay very low and then to try to get out, to try to move your money out.

*Q: Well, it sounds like both the economy and the government must have been pretty close to collapse, weren't they?*

HECK: I thought so. I am not sure that this would be the official American position, but tourism was a large part of the economy and, of course, it was dead. We would go to



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these very nice beach hotels and for \$15 a night get an air-conditioned room with, as they say, all the modern conveniencess. You know, everything would be just lovely with interesting little restaurants, and they were so desperate for business that they undercut themselves. You could get the best hotel in Colombo for \$35, and some people even could get down to \$20. It was a perfect time for those of us who lived on the island to travel, because all these hotels had been built when tourism was big and now they were just fighting, scrambling for money. When Primadosse came in, he decreed - he was one for decreeing, and his parliament backed him completely - but he succeeded in cutting way back the discount in hotel rooms. So the prices started going up when our Primadosse came in, but there was that halcyon period in there for foreigners who wanted to go on Sunday to spend the day down at the beach where you could get all sorts of very nice things for no money, because people were so desperate. But, of course, tourism spreads. It infected all of the car rentals, for instance. In Sri Lanka, like India - I don't think Sri Lanka did anyway - I don't think they ever rented a car without the driver. You couldn't with your license. If you didn't have a Sri Lankan license, you couldn't drive. So there had been a big market for drivers, and drivers suddenly had no jobs. Souvenir stands and people who sold coconuts on the road, the gem business, all the little ancillary things that people think of as Sri Lankan, were hurt. The port of Colombo had been trying to be a trans-shipment port. Well, no business in its right mind was going to trans- ship through Colombo in 1989 when they could trans-ship it through Singapore, or wherever. So everything started to dry up. It was a very, very bad time.

*Q: The Indians left about the time you left, didn't they?*

HECK: Yes, a little later.

*Q: Were you able to sit and have frank talks with the Indian embassy people? Could you see they were getting ready to get the hell out?*

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HECK: Oh, yes, they made no bones about it. After Primadosse started to talk about it and make all this bellicose noise that he couldn't do anything about, Rajiv Gandhi followed suit and said he was bringing the troops home. There was no question about this. They withdrew in an orderly manner, and they constricted their circle, as it were, and they went out of the ports on the eastern province. You know, it's just an overnight ship trip to up to southern India, so it wasn't particularly difficult, but it was long in coming. I am told that even today the Indians - well, I shouldn't say 'even today' because the Tamil Tigers are still very active - like the current Indian ambassador and his family, have bulletproof vests and they can never go anywhere without armed guards. They're still living in that cage that they had to live in in those days, and I suspect it will go on for some time. It's an important post for them, but it's a difficult one.

*Q: Was there any connection with the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in the Indian incursion?*

HECK: Oh, absolutely, Prabakharan ordered it, no doubt about that.

*Q: When did that happen?*

HECK: That happened while I was in Madras. That happened in May of '91 during the election campaign. Maybe we can talk about that when we talk about Madras.

*Q: What about Washington? Did you have any high-level visitors, or were people just sort of staying away?*

HECK: We had State Department visitors. We did not have a lot of high-level visitors. Visitors were staying away. First of all, particularly after the JVP started, we basically pulled our Peace Corps in. None of them, to the best of my knowledge, was ever hurt there, but they had tended to be out in the countryside in the south, since they couldn't go to the north because of the Tamils, so they began to be pulled in. We downsized our Peace Corps till, I think, it got to something like 13 people. We had a presence but only

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that. AID had had to refigure itself, because at the same AID was interested in the sort of privatization that began about the same time. There were efforts afoot to modernize, privatize, all this sort of thing, so our AID switched from doing the traditional AID things to more things like the stock market, which meant they could be in Colombo. They pulled in contractors. We rearranged our official lives. Everybody was on tenterhooks all the time, pins and needles all the time, waiting to see what was happening. Of course, the government just limped along. It was a travesty almost of what it had been. The cabinet brought in by Primadosse had some real hardliners in it as had the cabinet of J. R. Jayewardene, but his hardliners had always been suspected of perhaps being involved in helping arrange the Tamil bashing that had gone on in 1983. Primadosse came in and he made as his Foreign Minister a man who never had really been a politician. Early on, I think, he had been in the military or at least in a, not the military, but a home-guard-type organization. He had been a planter in the south, and he was full of resolve and was one of the most outspoken of the cabinet about bringing the country back into normalcy. He paid for it, of course; he got assassinated, but after I left, I guess. His motorcade was blown up as he was going to work one day, and presumably that was done by the Tamil Tigers, who were by that time the only game in town. They blew him up in such pieces that apparently parts of his body were on the telephone lines on the street that he was killed on. It put a huge hole in the street.

*Q: This was the time in the United States when we were really focused on what was going on...*

HECK: As the Soviet Union began to...

*Q: Sort of disintegrate and all. Am I right in saying you felt that developments in the subcontinent and all were really on the back burner and particularly in...*

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HECK: Certainly in Sri Lanka. I can't speak to India and Pakistan at that point, although I think you're probably right. I'm trying to think now, Stu, of visitors that we had then. We had a few Congressional visits, a couple. Larry Pressler came.

*Q: Your eyes went up at that time. What happened with him?*

HECK: Well, I'm not sure I want this in the report, but he was a very... Not Larry Pressler, I shouldn't have said Larry Pressler - Charlie, Texas Charlie, Charlie Wilson.

*Q: Wilson, oh yes.*

HECK: Texas Charlie Wilson. Larry Pressler was another incarnation; that was Madras. Texas Charlie came, and he was very bloodthirsty, as it were. He would like to have gone along on some of these raids and helped out, but he brought his young ladyfriend with him, and she wandered through town in short shorts, which was just unheard of in Madras and caused us no end of comment. But in any case, we had occasional members of Congress but just one or two. Solarz, of course, came, but he was the subcommittee chair for South Asia, and Steve Solarz was, of course, very much involved and very interested.

*Q: I'm just curious. I'm interviewing him tomorrow. I've been doing a series of interviews with him.*

HECK: Have you gotten to Sri Lanka yet.

*Q: Well, I don't know, but I can always.*

HECK: When Primadosse came in as President.... Well, first of all, I should say that our embassy, our ambassador, was accredited to the Maldives also. The Maldives are about 500 kilometers west/southwest in the Indian Ocean. It's a little group of atolls. The population while I was in Sri Lanka finally crossed 100,000 for the atoll. The Israelis had been in Sri Lanka for a number of years. In fact, the Israelis had presumably trained

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certain of the groups in the Sri Lankan government in handling terrorism and so on. They were also very active in a huge development of the Mahavali - it's a river basin in the south - agriculture development and infrastructure development. So they were doing good works, and they were providing training for the Sri Lankan military at a time when nobody else was going to give them training because of human rights type of questions. Primadosse promised to get rid of the Israelis if he were elected, or at least he talked about it. I'm not sure he actually made a promise, but it was talked about that he might, the reason being that seven percent of the population was Muslim. Although they are not, were not then and are not now, fanatics, they were not particularly pleased with this turn of events. I was in the Maldives accompanying my ambassador - by this time, it was Marion Creekmore - when Primadosse announced that he was giving me the Israeli diplomatic office, which was a two-man office with their wives - the wives worked - giving them a very short period of time to leave. He was kicking them out. Ambassador Creekmore believed, and I think he was right, that Primadosse chose this time when he, Ambassador Creekmore, was not in country, because he was at that point perhaps the most vocal about protecting the Israelis' right to be there. So it was certainly a frustration for the ambassador. Shortly thereafter Steve Solarz came, and I went along with him and the ambassador and his factotum to call on the President. I was there as the notetaker. This was President Primadosse by this point. Big British colonial office, huge expanses of red carpet, big couches for the guests, and an almost throne-like chair for R. Primadosse, the President. This office was in the old parliament building which is down on the ocean and, as I said, very colonial. In any case, the meeting, as far as I was concerned, got cut short, because Steve Solarz chose to raise the issue of the closure of the Israeli embassy in Sri Lanka. He was, as you can imagine - if you've ever sat in on his meetings, he can be very blunt when he wishes to be, and this was a very blunt statement of American displeasure about this action and that the United States did not take it lightly and this was against international norms of decency in terms of relations, something to that effect. I've never seen Steve Solarz flummoxed before, but I think he actually was. Primadosse just lashed out at him and talked to him like a real Dutch uncle - that's the second time today I've used that phrase - but anyway,

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really was very harsh and said in effect, "It is none of your business. This is my country. I am its leader. I will do what I think is right for my country, and it is not the United States' business. Be quiet." It seemed like forever, but I suspect it was only about 30 seconds of absolute quiet. The Steve Solarz got up, some perfunctory handshakes, and we were out the door. It was really a tongue lashing from the President to Steve Solarz on this issue. But Steve Solarz' subcommittee staff person was Peter Galbraith, John Kenneth's son who later became ambassador to Croatia under Carter and is now - I'm not quite sure what he's doing. He started to run for Congress and then decided not to. But both Steve Solarz and Peter Galbraith were very up on what was going on. They were as well informed as anyone could possibly be who was not right there all the time. So it was always something of a pleasure to have somebody like that come, who can carry some water. But those visits were not all that common, and then other than that, it was basically, as I remember, officials from the State Department or from the Executive Branch of government, from whatever organization, AID or Peace Corps or whatever. I do remember one time that we were supposed to have a visit of one of the Army bands which was on a goodwill tour of Asia. At more or less the last minute it was canceled because it would be too dangerous for the Army band to come. We always thought that was sort of funny, because we had women and children there, and if little babies could survive in Colombo, surely the Army band could, but anyway for whatever reason it didn't come. There had been in the past ship visits. Those had been canceled by the time I got there. I don't think we had a ship visit. All of our ship visits, and there were a number of them, were in the Maldives and were used basically for a little bit of shore time for these guys who were on ships for six months at a time without a great deal of opportunity to get off. The Maldives was not a good R&R point for them, because it's a very small little place. I don't think they were even let into the capital island; they were just let on some of the tourist islands. You could buy a beer at the bar, but it still was just a little tourist island with some water sports and some restaurants, and that would be it.

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*Q: Did Sri Lanka take much of an interest in things in the Persian Gulf? This is the Iran-Iraq War and...*

HECK: The Iran-Iraq War, well, no, not really. That was a very focused country for my four years, just matters of survival. Iran and Iraq both had embassies there. They were both friendly nations as far as the Sri Lankans were concerned. The Muslims in Sri Lanka had no particular ethnic ties to either group. There was nothing particular other than what Iran and Iraq might perhaps be able to give them. The Iraqi ambassador was a very big part of the social scene while I was there. The Iranians were young and intense and basically kept to themselves. They may have been muddling around in Islamic things, but I wasn't particularly aware.

*Q: India, of course, had these close ties to the Soviet Union, and we're talking about a dissolving Soviet Union at the time. Had the Soviets messed around in Sri Lanka, and their implosion or whatever it was, was that having any effect?*

HECK: I'm sure that wherever one has intelligence services somebody is probably doing something that he wouldn't want to see on the front page of the newspaper. But, no, I do not know of anything particularly that they were doing nor do I remember ever asking any of my confreres in the intelligence services. They had a big embassy there, much larger than they probably would have needed elsewhere otherwise, so presumably, yes, they must have had some interest in the island. They certainly were not doing the sorts of things that they did in India where you would know openly that they were supporting monetarily this newspaper or that, or that they were putting money into this party or that. Communists were almost nonexistent in Sri Lanka when I was there, and the ones that I did know basically had gotten over it. It was the sort of thing they did when they were in their 30s, and now they were all 75 and they weren't particularly that way. They were leftists but they weren't really Communists. We had a Trotskyite Party. I had a friend who was a member of parliament, and is still a member of parliament, as a matter of fact, and is a Trotskyite. One of the cheap ways to leave Sri Lanka was to fly on Aeroflot



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through Moscow and then transfer to something else. He and his wife were going to Europe once. He had a heart attack in the airport in Moscow, and his cousin, who is also a parliamentarian, told me later that Emil, this particular gentleman, was just panicked. He was conscious and he was so afraid of what was going to happen to him when he was taken to the Soviet hospital, because he was a Trotskyite and they were going to get him. This was in the late '80s. So we did have some Trotskyites, but not a lot. Anyway, it was a large embassy, the Russian embassy, and I became quite well acquainted with my counterpart, the political counselor, who, like me, had spent a lot of time in South Asia, so we had a lot to sort of gossip about, sort of one-upmanship with "my stories are better than your stories." I remember once toward the end of my stay there he and I decided - the Soviet Union was in the process of breaking up, it was the glasnost era, and there had been perestroika and all - we decided to do a joint demarche, and the two of us marched in on the foreign secretary. I don't even remember now what it was we were talking about, but it was a real motherhood issue. Everybody was in favor of this. But this man's jaw just dropped when he saw the two of us walk through the door together, because they were still seeing us as being completely at loggerheads. The one sad thing I remember at that point about sort of the breakup of what used to be the Soviet sphere of influence was the Yugoslav Embassy. I remember being told once when I met this man at my ambassador's home - it was a luncheon of some sort, and I'm not even sure why - but anyway, the ambassador for Yugoslavia was from Bosnia and he was a Muslim. By the beginning of 1990 Yugoslavia was - I'm not sure when Slovenia became independent - but anyway, it was all obviously going to be a real mess. The government in Belgrade hadn't sent money for this embassy for months, so they were just living on their own personal savings and couldn't supply things to the embassy. But more to the point, he was the only - and it was a small embassy - he was the only one from Bosnia. The rest of them were all Serbs, the other four or whatever. It was, as I said, a very small number. Anyway, he was the enemy. He was the ambassador but he was also the enemy, and he was really one shaken man. The fight hadn't started yet in Bosnia, but it was coming, and the Serbs weren't very nice about it. I remember that.

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*Q: What about, in the political life there, the hand of the doctrinaire socialists coming out of the London School of Economics, the British sort of labor class stuff? Had that - I'm using a loaded word - infected the Sri Lankan body politic?*

HECK: Not the way it had in India. Yes, there was among the older intelligencia a certain residue of that, but it never was quite as strong even among the intelligencia, which was a small group of people on a small island. One of the things, by the way, that one noticed in Sri Lanka was how everybody who was anybody knew everybody else who was anybody, and that crossed the line, Tamils and non-Tamils alike. The elite, such as it were, such as it had been, had been educated together, knew each other, knew each other's nicknames, knew each other's foibles, knew who had had an affair with whom, that sort of thing. It was just almost incestuous, it was so interlocked. But going back to the question, one of the real differences is that Sri Lanka, partially because of its size, appeared to get everything just handed to it on a platter. People will talk about the freedom fighters in Sri Lanka. Well, for every 1,000 freedom fighters, maybe three of them were, and they tended to be the ideologues, they tended to be the people who liked the Trotskyite or the Communist or the London School of Economics believer in changing the economic system, people like that. But the word 'freedom fighter', it seemed to be in reading obits, got thrown around an awful lot in Sri Lanka, when really it meant that maybe this guy had passed out pamphlets once, that sort of thing. The struggle for independence was, in comparison with the Indian subcontinent, nonexistent, almost nonexistent. The British put all of their effort into stemming it and then finally acquiesced to it on the subcontinent. That's where the battles were fought. That's where the real battles, the struggles were. Once the freedom fighters in that part of the world looked like they were winning, the British just basically gave Sri Lanka its independence at the same time. There were so many things that that meant. If you looked at it in comparison with India or Pakistan, the Sri Lankans were much more likely to want foreign goods, accept foreign goods, have foreign goods early on. India got to this point, is at that point now, but when I first went to India, everything was locally made. People wearing Western clothes, particularly women wearing Western costumes,

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Western dress, and street names that were not changed. India and Pakistan are full of obscure people's names on streets. In my part of the world in Sri Lanka, they were still the old names. They were named after various viceroys and things like that. There seemed to be less antagonism toward the colonial experience. It was just a softer situation. So that, I think, is partially the reason that the sort of social and political ideas that perhaps came from the West in the '30s didn't get such resonance there. Also, Sri Lanka doesn't have the great poverty that India or Pakistan had in that period. The poorest part of the country is the part that the Tamils want now, because it's dry, but even that isn't terribly poor. In the south it is said that one of the reasons the Tamils got such a hold on jobs originally was that no Sri Lankan had to do this sort of thing. He could just sit there under his fill-in-the-blank mango tree/papaya tree/breadfruit tree and wait for a piece of fruit to fall into his hands and he didn't have to really work hard to earn outside money. Life was just easier all the way through.

*Q: Why don't we stop at this point. You left there in...*

HECK: I left there in the summer of 1990.

*Q: But as you left, did somebody ask you whither is Sri Lanka, what would you have said at that time?*

HECK: I think I would have said the same thing that I would say now. The country is on the right road economically I think, politically, certainly socially in terms of all the quality-of-life things that I mentioned earlier. The insurgency, I believe, is not as popular among the average Tamil populace as it was in 1986, but I don't think that the Sri Lankan military is ever going to win this insurgency until they kill Prabakharan, and I think that once they kill him, this will be over at least for this generation. Certainly the Sri Lankan government in its current incarnation is making all of the proper noises about bringing them back into the fold, making them part of a larger entity, Sri Lanka, giving them a considerable amount of autonomy for the north and eastern regions. The poor people are up there now still without

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so many things. Now apparently at this particular juncture today, Jaffna is actually in the hands of the Sri Lankan army, so it now apparently does have electricity and cars can run, but they can't drive down to the rest of the country, because the area around Bavulia along the border is still disputed territory and there's plenty of what is called jungle there. It's more like scrub jungle, but anyway wild country. There are lots of insurgents out there somewhere.

*Q: All right, well, then we'll pick this up the next time. 1990 you went where? HECK: To Madras.*

*Q: And you were in Madras when to when?*

HECK: From July of 1990 to July of 1993.

*Q: All right, we'll pick that up the next time then.*

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Today is August 26th, 1998. Ernie, '90 to '93, Madras seemed like a logical assignment. Was there any problem with it, or it just went?

HECK: You mean a problem in getting the assignment?

*Q: Getting the assignment.*

HECK: No, it sort of just happened, it just was there. I had, at that point, had a lot of years in the subcontinent, seven of which had been in India. The issues which were big in Sri Lanka, in some instances at least - and I mean by that the Tamil Tigers and the general question of the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka - this was also a big issue in Madras, so it made sense. I went off in the summer of 1990. I was the consul general. We had 15 Americans and about 100 Indians and another 135 contractors. We had several different agencies including two intelligence agencies and USIA and the Commerce Department

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as well as the State Department. The consular district was about 205,000,000 people. It covered four states, the four southern states. These are generally referred to as the Dravidian area as opposed to the Aryan area in the north. The languages are all different. The alphabets on all four are different one from the other as well as from the northern alphabet. But the people are generally related. It was a fascinating area and one about which I didn't really have a lot of background. It's funny but the so-called India experts in many cases, this phrase, means north Indian experts, and a lot about the history and the forces that form these states in the south really is not very well known by a lot of Americans. It's also true that it's not very well known by a lot of Indians who are in positions to do something about it. I was always interested how different political events looked in the north from in the south and how we were just in sort of a different world down there. The capital of the state of Tamil Nadu is where we have the consulate. This is a historical thing, because, of course, it's on the ocean and it was the place that the British set up their regional headquarters early on and where the Americans, of course, landed when they came into south India in the late 18th century. One of the buildings in the area, still there, now a college dorm, is a roundish sort of a building called the Ice House, and it's where American ice used to land in the late 1700s in large blocks and be carried in. That was what kept the British gin and tonics cold, I guess, if they had ice in their drinks, I'm not sure that they did. But we were the main suppliers of ice going back to the 19th century. This is only the second oldest consulate in India, I believe. I think Calcutta was a few years older than us but not by very much, and we've had a consulate there in some form or another going back to the early 19th century, and I think that there was representation from the United States in the late 18th century as well. So it's an old post. It probably would not be the consulate general if we were able to set up a consulate for the south today; we would probably put it in Bangalore, which is the Silicon Valley of the nation, the big high-tech place for India, and it is home to perhaps the most number of American businesses in the south. But history and the fact that we own property in Madras keeps us down there and probably will keep us down there for the foreseeable future. During my

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time, however, we did open a Commerce Department office in Bangalore. Bangalore is about a 7-hour drive from Madras or a little bit over an hour's flight if you go by plane.

*Q: Who was the ambassador up in India in '90 when you arrived?*

I think you're telling me something. We're have a very long pause.

HECK: The ambassador when I arrived was Bill Clark. I am trying to remember whether he was actually in country when I arrived. Yes, I think he was. He was there for about a year after I arrived, a little bit more, then there was a break, and he was followed by Tom Pickering, who was there from August of '92 to March of '93, so his tenure was very, very short. There was a considerable period in between where there was a charg#, and, of course, following Tom Pickering's departure, a charg# was in place for I think over a year or about a year anyway, certainly for the rest of my tenure. But I should say that the embassy is 1,000 kilometers from Madras. In the early '90s telephones were not all that great. We did not have e-mail. Madras at least had only unclassified Wangs and we were not connected to the outer world until after I left the post in mid-'93.

*Q: A Wang being a computer?*

HECK: Well, no, a word processor, not even a computer. Now, of course, I think almost all of our posts are on a worldwide e-mail net, so there can be communications. But I can remember one period of almost a month while I was in Madras when what is called the PTT, the post and telegraph people in India, telephones, telegraph on post, went on strike in the four southern states. Nobody in New Delhi seemed to notice this. Now I'm not talking about the embassy, but the government of India didn't seem to notice it either. And it meant that for almost a month the only way the embassy could really communicate with us was by sending a cable. We couldn't telephone them even. That's assuming that the telephones work, but they didn't work at all. They were always getting cut anyway. I would get cut off from calls to Delhi all the time. So we really were without connection with the embassy. During this period it go so bad in the area that businesspeople were flying

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in from Japan and flying in from the United States to do business, to make contracts, or to talk to their businesses out there, their suppliers perhaps or whatever, because there was just no way that we could get in touch with the outer world. Even the parliament in New Delhi didn't really seem to care very much. It finally worked itself out, and we got back on line, but it was very interesting to be in a place where everything just stopped. Money transactions stopped, and there were no cables, and there were no telephone calls, and there was no mail. We did have fax, but it didn't work, of course, because the telephone lines were down. Even when the faxes did work, they didn't, because there was one period, as I think I told you, Stu- (end of tape)

He would pack them up at the end of the day and deliver them over with his driver, and that was how we were getting our mail. No one in Washington would believe us, because faxes don't work that way, do they? But yes, they do in certain places in the world. So that's the way it was.

*Q: Just to get a feel for India at that time, here was a lot of very sophisticated Silicon-Valley-type investment. India was really opening up, wasn't it, in your area?*

HECK: Well, during my tenure it opened up considerably. There had been tentative moves by Mrs. Gandhi, and after her death by Rajiv Gandhi, her successor, to do just that, but it hadn't really taken. Then there were problems in the Indian body politic, and there was a period of some uncertainty, and a series of people held the prime ministership for short periods of time and none of them were very strong, I mean personally strong, but they didn't have the power base to really do too much about it. The real beginning of the opening up, although most of those American firms were there in some measure when I arrived, or at least many of them were, the real opening up came when P.V. Narasimha Rao, who was a member of the Congress Party, the party of Jawaharlal Nehru, when he became prime minister and leader of the pack. The economic situation of the country was very bad in that there was almost no foreign reserve left. There were just weeks left of foreign reserves, and it kind of finally shook the party into doing things that, of course, it



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should have done many, many years previously. It then made some real efforts to open the economy. What they did was courageous in light of the way things worked in India. The talk of self reliance and keeping other businesses out had been so much a part of the Indian body politic going back to before the British left and when the Congress Party in its effort to get independence for the nation made a big part of its campaign one of what they called swadeshi, of only buying things that were locally made, that were from India. This, of course manifested itself in all the burning of British cloth and that sort of thing in the '30s. But the very idea of letting other people get into the Indian economy in terms of doing business was one that was very unpopular with a very vocal part of the Indian politicians. So to change that made a big difference. There were several things that were done to open up, and one of them was to get rid of a lot of the paperwork or at least to try to get rid of a lot of the paperwork that was involved in doing business in India. They used to say that India had a license raj, the raj, of course, being the government. You had to have a license to breathe down there if you were a businessman. Businessmen used to spend most of their time on airplanes going to and from New Delhi to bend the knee in front of somebody or another and try to get another piece of paper to do whatever it was. What came out of all that was that there might be two firms in the whole country that made a certain product, whether it was zippers or thread or anything, and the idea of opening that to market forces and the sort of modern global economy was very scary to a lot of people including to a lot of bureaucrats. A lot of the businesses liked this at first, and then only as they began to have competition from products which were better made and came from somewhere else, whether it was Japan or Sweden or Canada or the U.S., then they began to think maybe it wasn't such a grand idea either. So the whole process has moved in fits and starts, and right now it's in a period, I would say, of some steps backward instead of forward, because it's a very conservative government that's in power at the moment. But it was opened up in the early '90s to some extent, and that did make a difference. A lot of American businesses came in to look around, if not in my consular district, in one of the other three, particularly in fields like power generation, big things like that, as well as the high-tech industries. The power generation has moved more slowly, I would say.

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Part of the problem has been that each state controls its own. It's very much a system of federalism like ours in that sense. But it has, I think, been better in terms of the high tech, one of the reasons being that India is full of very good, young computer engineers trained at some very good schools, and there is a ten-and-a-half-hour time difference, so they can be working for us during their daytime and it's our nighttime, and it makes our businesses move very much more rapidly.

*Q: But you need telephone connections to make that make any difference.*

HECK: Oh, yes, and we need things like electricity, of which there's a shortage. For many of the other businesses one of the big problems is the infrastructure of the country. The road system is just abominable. Cars have multiplied like rabbits, and the roads are these 1930s two-lane highways which one shares with a variety of other wheeled vehicles including ox carts and so on, so it's very hard to move products. But India is working on all those things. In any case, my job in Madras, aside from just the administration of this presence, became really mainly commercial and business related on one side and consular related on another. There are over a million Indians in the United States, citizens, permanent residents, students, growing rapidly. The Indian community in the United States in the mid-'80s, and probably still, had the best education of any immigrant group in the United States and the highest per-capita income of any first-generation group in the United States, at least of the major ones that we have coming in from overseas. This is probably changing as more family members of citizens come in and are perhaps less educated, but the United States is full of Indian doctors and nurses and scientists and university professors and computer specialists of all types, I mean technically very well qualified people. And they all have relatives, a quarter of whom are in my consular district, and they all want to come or they want to go for a visit or they want to send servants so that the young doctor in Potomac, Maryland, can be taken care of the way he's supposed to. So the consular lines were just tremendous. I, of course, had never had any consular work at all. I had had a three-week consular course in 1968, and the law has changed hundreds of times since then. What I had heard in 1968 didn't make much difference on the way

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things were in 1990. Our consular office was terribly overworked. I found myself doing an awful lot of letters for them to VIPs around India. I got phone calls from chief ministers, I got phone calls from cabinet ministers in New Delhi, you name it. I could be awakened at any hour of the day or night. In fact, the first thing I had to do, the first major task I had to do when I arrived in the summer, I got a phone call from my deputy chief of mission, or charg# - I'm not sure which he was at that point - but my ambassador in New Delhi, Bill Clark, had been called by a prominent member of parliament from the state of Andhra Pradesh, which is where Hyderabad is. He called the ambassador at some ungodly hour, like two in the morning, to give him the rundown on why he needed a tourist visa for the daughter of a chief minister of the state of Andhra Pradesh, who had just finished college and was going to go visit one of her brothers who lived in California. So the ambassadors apparently, before I got there, sent the word down that Miss Such-and-Such was to have this visa. She was given the visa. This chief minister had been a very famous movie star in Andhra, had millions of dollars. There was no question about support, and there were legal residents in the United States who were her brothers and perhaps they were even citizens. But, in any case, she got the tourist visa and then, of course, three days later there was in the newspaper the story about this huge wedding that she had just had to some man who lived in the United States. At that point our brides, because of the visa restrictions for wives of green card holders, or at least as they were then, our brides from my states were having to wait over a year to join their husbands. That's an untenable position to be in in India, because you then move in with these perfect strangers who are your in-laws and you sit there without the support of your own family and wait for this man you hardly know to get to the point where you can go and join him. So this was obviously a scam, and I was told to go up there and to tell the then Chief Minister to get his daughter back, she had gone to the United States, and so I did. I went to Hyderabad on my first calls, and I went among other things to see the Chief Minister, and I had breakfast with him, and it was all very warm and fuzzy, and then I pulled this thing on him about what a great embarrassment it would be to him personally to see this in the newspaper and wouldn't it be nice if he would bring his daughter back and let us process her as she should be

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processed. And he did, but I did not like that. I knew right then I was not cut out to be a consular officer. I was used to worming material out of people. I was not used to telling them what to do. It turned out that the man she married was a citizen of the United States, so all she had to wait was, like, three weeks. We got her processed very rapidly. The father had all the money in the world, so bringing her home was no problem. But that always stuck with me that I had had to pull this on a very famous personage in India, and I didn't find it easy to do. But, as I said, I would get phone calls every day. I would get them from my Rotary Club. I became a Rotarian. I was the first woman Rotarian in Madras at that point. I would be called up all hours of the day or night by these people, and I would also, because the consular section was so far behind in letter writing, I found myself more and more, not at the beginning but as the consul in charge changed and the new one was perhaps not as rapid in getting his work done as the first one, writing letters constantly to keep them up, because they would be weeks late in the letter writing. The poor vice consuls - we had three first-term officers - were working themselves just silly, absolutely silly. The consular section had four people, and it should have had six or eight. It was a great pity. But those were our two biggest problems, or biggest responsibilities, in the south.

*Q: What about promoting business there? In a way, it would be counterproductive for the United States to encourage businessmen to invest in India.*

HECK: Well, no, we were trying very hard to get more American investment in or at least to facilitate. India is such a big potential market, and the middle class in India, by American standards, is like 150,000,000 people. It's something worth going after. Business was interested although in many cases, when they saw all the hoops they had to jump through, it became just easier for them to take their money and put it in southeast Asia or put it in China or send it somewhere else. But we had a lot of people asking, and there was also a big Indian-American business community here in the United States which, all things being equal, wanted to help their original country and were very interested in setting up businesses in India. So, no, we had a constant stream of people coming for all sorts of

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things, cell phones, just all sorts of interesting things. Tobacco, the big American tobacco companies were trying to break into the big tobacco market in India. There is a lot of smoking in India and an indigenous tobacco crop. Anyway, we had more than our share, and we had a Commerce office in Delhi, an FCS office with several officers. Each of the other three consulates general had an FCS officer from the Department of Commerce whose main job was to push American business in India. We had various fairs and shows, lots of catalog shows, lots of actual more hands-on type shows. It seemed to me I was cutting ribbons or giving opening speeches to things all of the time. American hospitals were interested. There was a whole series of Indian physicians and doctors who were trying to set up American-style hospital facilities in various towns and cities in the south and, I suspect, all over India. No, there were all sorts of things which were happening.

*Q: Did you find a different attitude towards the United States down there than you did up there?*

HECK: Yes, I think so. Well, I think anytime you're out of a capital in a big country like that, you see a different facet of it. The south Indians in general were, of course, every bit as patriotic as Indians in any other part of the country, but they were a long way from what is the major interest certainly in New Delhi and probably in Bombay, and that's Pakistan. That means all of the permutations of the relationship with Pakistan, whether it's the nuclear issue or whether it's shooting at each other on the Koon glacier up in Kashmir or whether they're lobbying things across the border somewhere or whether they're training insurgents in each other's country to send into the other. Those were issues up in Delhi, and the United States got involved in that in that we were very often seen as pro-Pakistani, and, therefore, there would be demonstrations against us on that and the other and so on. Down in the south it didn't come up much. Now I'm sure if there had been a real war with Pakistan while we were there, we would have seen the patriotism coming out, but it just didn't matter. Business was what was mattering in the towns and the cities that I dealt with, the major cities of Hyderabad, Bangalore and Madras, and in smaller cities throughout the region it was much more business related than anything else, and the great

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desire to send whichever relatives needed to the States. So we didn't get involved a lot in the sort of political issues that took place in New Delhi. Politics in the south is a different ball game. I'm just trying to remember. I think when I arrived none of the four states in my district - I had the four states of Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu plus the remains of the French presence in Pondicherry, which means also three little enclaves on the eastern and western coasts of the south - in none of those places was there a government of the ruling Congress Party at that point. Later on one of the four states - in fact two of the four states - became Congress at various points, and then lost it again. But basically regional parties are what run the politics in the south, and they are very chauvinistic about their own state, about their own ethnic heritage, about their own language, and their issues are different. So as far as they're concerned, dealing with the center, with whoever rules in New Delhi, is one of which party do we back and we will back them in parliament and they will leave us alone and let us do what we want in our own state. That's how things were down there, interesting, very different from New Delhi.

*Q: I assume you were reporting on the politics. Were there any developments that really were of particular concern to the United States?*

HECK: The issues changed over time, of course, but we had lots and lots of Sri Lankan refugees in camps in Tamil Nadu. We had Dravidian parties ruling in Tamil Nadu for the whole time. There are two major Dravidian parties, and they have gone back and forth, so both of the two major parties were ruling. In Kerala we had for part of the time I was there a Communist government.

*Q: That used to be a great concern to us. HECK: It isn't a great concern to us anymore, partially because the Soviet Union fell apart, had fallen apart by then. The Soviet Union was not bankrolling anything. While we were there, the Russians had to close their library in Kerala, and they were flogging on the streets busts of Lenin and so on. Nobody wanted to buy them. They had the complete works of Stalin, and nobody cared. But the Communist Party in Kerala has become a very Kerala party. It's just another Kerala*

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*national party. The Communist Party in India has shrunk. There have been two major ones, one pro-Beijing, one pro-Moscow, but the whole number of members of these parties has shrunk and in many cases the parties have become almost irrelevant. There are a couple of places left where the parties have become regional. One of them is Kerala in the south, and one of them is Tripura up on the northeast along the Burma border areas. But they're not what they used to be. They really are regional parties just as the Tamil Nadu Dravidian parties were regional and the Andhra Pradesh regional party was regional. It's just regional politics now. And, no, they're not antagonistic particularly nor dangerous to the United States or to the welfare of the country of India, in fact quite the opposite.*

*Q: Did you find yourself sort of working on the Indian bureaucracy to make it easier for American business to exist?*

HECK: Well, we certainly tried. It was of mixed blessing. Everybody in the south, the four governments in the south, all spoke a good story, claimed to be eager for investment, would flog projects, whatever they might be. I'm thinking now of the big hydroelectric things that they wanted to do, the big power projects, generation of power being a major need to modernize the country. But talking a good story and doing something about it are two different things. Corruption is still a major part of the political ballgame in that part of the world. There are lots of palms to be greased. Many of the palms to be greased belonged to relatives or caste members or otherwise connected to leaders of various state governments. These were all major problems for us. As I may have said before, one of the impediments along the way to modernization, capitalization of the economy, privatization, all of the things that the United States would have wanted to see in India in order to open the markets and make it a level playing field - one of the major impediments was the bureaucracy, the civil servant of India. As you know, a determined, high-ranking civil servant in charge of a specifically big office can put a great deal of brakes on for this sort of thing. So there was that to be faced also. It was not, perhaps, the easiest thing in the world, but it was definitely worth doing and we were certainly trying.



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*Q: Were there any particular development while you were there, for example, Rajiv Gandhi's?*

HECK: Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated just beyond the outskirts of Madras one night. It was May of '91. He was running. He wanted to be back in as prime minister, and I think he would have made it. He was the legitimate leader of the party. At that point Congress did not rule in New Delhi. One of the short-lived coalitions from the left side of the spectrum was in charge, but Rajiv was the party leader of the Congress Party, and he was campaigning in a place called Sri Perambur, which was a few miles outside of Madras on the road to Bangalore. He was in a big field. It was 10:30 at night. In India the campaigning starts at dawn and goes until midnight or two a.m., and it gets later and later, falls further and further behind, so this was probably scheduled for before that. Anyway, he was to address this gathering of people in this field, and a Tamil woman, young woman, came up to him with flowers. It's the custom in India to drape flowers around people's necks as a sign of honor, very much like what we have in Hawaii with the leis. In any case, this lady had a garland in her hands, and she knelt or bent over to touch his feet, which is another very common gesture in India of respect, and she triggered something in her waist and blew herself and him up. He was in pieces. It was a very, very awful thing, great carnage. Other people were killed. It turned out later that she was a Sri Lankan Tamil, she was a member of the Lady Tigers, and she was doing this on direction from Prabhakaran in Sri Lanka. This is how far he had come from being the hero of the Sri Lankan Tigers to being their sworn enemy. The thing that interested me the most about this indicated the way things work in India, both in how governments in India react to tragedies like this - this was not the first one, of course; his mother had been assassinated before him - and also about the communications. The evening news was on at ten o'clock. I had watched it, and I had gone to bed about 10:15 or 10:30. It had happened at more or less 10:30, as I understand it. I had a kind of a private area upstairs. It was a bedroom and a sort of an office outside that you could close both rooms off, and I had closed them off. There were telephones on the desks in my office room as well as by my bed. About 12:00 or

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12:15 the phone rang, and I got up to answer it and I got as far as understanding it was the embassy, and then the lines were cut. This happened a couple of times. The second time I don't think I even knew it was the embassy, but I figured it must have been, and I couldn't get through to them. Well, I just went back to bed. I figured they'd reach me. About an hour and a half later I got a phone call that came in clear as a bell, and it was from the op center in Washington DC, and that's how I learned that Rajiv Gandhi had been killed. It was not publicized. At that point nobody officially knew this in Madras. The Indian government had not announced it. The body had not been brought in. They had clamped on an absolute hold. So I got up, and I got out of bed the member of my political section who was our Tamil person. Because of the difference in languages, both written and spoken, as well as because of the vastness of the area, we had a separate Indian person for each of the four states. I got my Tamil person out of bed, and he and I went to the consulate general. When I drove down, the streets were absolutely calm and quiet and empty, and it just looked like any other night at about two in the morning, a few drunks rolling home and that was about it. But he and I got on the phones, and we started calling people. Of course, the newspapers knew about it by then. We talked to politicians and we talked to newsmen, and we wrote a cable. We got the communicator in, and we sent this message out. In fact, I think we sent several that night. But anyway, by the time we started home again, it was close to five in the morning and the town was beginning to wake up. People obviously knew then, because there were crowds gathering on the streets, and there was obvious tension in the air. They brought the remains of Rajiv into town that morning. There wasn't much to send to New Delhi, but they brought what they could and sent him out. His family was not with him. His wife and his two children had not accompanied him on this trip, so it was just what remained of him and some of the people who had come with him. There was then a tremendous outpouring of sorrow all over the country, a very big state funeral for the man. It was in May. It was very, very hot. I'm sure the people who had to sit in the sun in New Delhi waiting for that funeral pyre to be lit must have really roasted. Our monsoon in the south was at a different time of the year than the rest of the country, or at least in Tamil Nadu it was at a different time, so we were not suffering quite the way they

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were. But at the same time in my state - and when I say that, I mean Tamil Nadu since that was where I was physically present - the backlash against Sri Lankan Tamils was immediate. Here again, it was a case of things having changed 180 degrees, because the first reaction of people in Tamil Nadu and, in fact, all over India when the troubles began in Sri Lanka in 1983 had been one of great support, tremendous support for the Sri Lankan Tamils. The various groups had been given asylum in Tamil Nadu. The Indian government had trained these groups in many cases. There was a great back and forth. There was all sorts of support going from India for them, and this began, of course, to change when the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka started attacking the Indian army. But it really changed in Tamil Nadu when this happened, and all of a sudden people were being chased out. People in refugee camps tended to be poorer, the farmers, the small people - they were not hurt at all. But all over the big cities there were Tamils living in towns and cities, and in many cases protected by the Indian government. I'm thinking now of representatives of the Tamil Tigers. They were hunted, and a number of them, particularly in the Bangalore area, were surrounded and there would be shootouts, and a number of them would be killed. They were basically chased away from the major cities. They were not welcome in India at that point, nor have they been since. In fact, the ones who were captured have recently been tried and, I believe, have been given life terms. In fact, some of them, I think, were given a death sentence, but I don't think anything has happened from that. The one exception to this was on the southeastern coast of Tamil Nadu at the area closest to the Jaffna Peninsula, where there were a lot of cross-straight marriages, family ties, and so on. That particular area way down there, which was pretty primitive and cut off from most of the country by lack of decent roads, people down there still had the ties and they would give protection. Basically Tamils in Tamil Nadu who just wanted these people out didn't want trouble, didn't like people shooting on their main streets, didn't like blowing up prime ministers or ex-prime ministers, once and future prime ministers. The mood really changed, and that was a major political event in the period that I was there. In terms of American relations with south India, I think one that went on until after she left the chief ministership of Tamil Nadu was the unlawful taking over of a large part of the campus

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of what had been an American missionary school in the hills bordering Tamil Nadu and Kerala. This is at a place called Kody Canal, and the school there had been there since the 19th century. It had been a Lutheran school, and title to it had been given to an Indian branch of the Lutheran Church after independence. It was still a Lutheran school. It still had plenty of foreign professors and teachers, and it was a boarding school going through high school and down into the lower grades. Jayalalitha, who was then the chief minister, a woman, the chief minister of the state of Tamil Nadu, another movie star who had made it into politics, had some personal reasons for wanting to turn it over to some personal supporters of hers. Some of what they call in India gundas or thugs went into this building in the middle of the night during the summer vacation when the teachers were gone and just stole it. Then for the next two years the U.S., certainly the Lutheran synod in Missouri and the school - it's an incorporated school in India and it has a board of directors who are international in scope but lots of Indians - tried desperately to get it back. Basically the chief minister would just look at us and smile, and nothing ever happened. When she lost power, I gather that the fortunes of the missionaries changed, and I am not really sure what the status of that is now, but we spent an inordinate amount of time on that and got absolutely nowhere except holding hands with a lot of very nice missionary folk trying to encourage them but being unable to handle it. She is no longer the chief minister of the state. She is under all sorts of threats of lawsuits. She may, in fact, go to jail, but right now she has attached her party's star to the ruling party in New Delhi, and she is the king maker, or I guess you would say the queen maker in this case, of the BJP government ruling in Delhi now, because she holds a certain number of parliament seats there. She's really wielding the whip at the moment, and I don't know how this will all come out, whether she will go to jail, whether any of her friends will ever get back the building that they had wanted. It was choice lakeside property in a hill station, which means it would be worth a lot for apartment buildings and tourist hotels and that sort of thing.

*Q: They weren't trying to use it as a university?*

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HECK: Oh, no, no, no, no, no. This was strictly for money. This had nothing to do with improving the lot of the local people or anything else. I remember her telling me once before she became a chief minister that one of the reasons that she would not ever be tempted by corruption or by bribes was the fact that she was so very wealthy. She had been a very successful ingenue teamed both in real life and on the screen with M. G. Ramachundrin, who had been a previous chief minister, was chief minister until the day he died, who was a tremendously popular movie star. It was like having Ronald Reagan a hundred times over. People saw this man as a god. He left her money, and she had earned her own money, and her mother had been a film star. There was lots of money. She didn't need money. Well, it turned out she was an extraordinarily corrupt chief minister even by Indian standards. So I guess just having a lot of money does not necessarily keep you on the straight and narrow in conditions like this. There were some caste reasons for this. She had a girlfriend at that point, and there were some reasons that her friend, Shasha Kala, had connections with the people who got the property. It was all terribly intertwined, and who knows what the real reason was that this was allowed, but it was certainly protected, let's say.

*Q: When you arrived, the Gulf War just over.*

HECK: No, the Gulf War had just begun, had not begun actually. It's interesting because the Gulf War impacted - I do not like that word - made a big impact in Tamil Nadu and in Madras particularly. This was because the night that the Iraqis went into Kuwait in August of 1990, the British Airways flight that went from London to Kuwait to Madras was on the ground in Kuwait and the people who were on that plane were basically from Madras. A lot of Madrasis, a lot of people from Madras, then were captured, were prisoners, because that plane, the British Airways plane, was not allowed to take off. They included one of the biggest industrialists in the city who had a lot of business ties with the United States, collaborations with the United States. They included a man who was a Mennan, Mennans being a group from Kerala, a Mennan who lived in the United States and was either an

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American citizen or a green card holder and was very important in the film industry. I think at that point he was one of the heads of MGM. He was on that plane. I mean, all sorts of people were on the plane. So people in Madras paid a great deal of attention to this, but, we were a long way away from the Gulf War. In the period following that, the Indians were basically treated well and ultimately released by the Iraqis, but it was all these people who looked like Indians but maybe had American passports that one really worried about, because they were fair game, and all sorts of things happened to various people. Some escaped. Some never did escape and only got out afterwards. Some went underground in Kuwait and were alright but couldn't come home. So it was something that people followed. Then in about October Madras and Bombay both began to be used as bases for planes to come through on their way to the Gulf, Bombay more. But I remember going out to the airport once when the commandant of the Marine Corps and his entire planeload of generals and colonels came through on their way to Kuwait, where they were going to help plan strategy for the war, and we moved a certain amount of cargo through Madras which was destined for Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, not until later to Kuwait. So in that sense there was some impact. This was handled in a very low key manner. We did not get a lot of publicity in Madras as they did in Bombay, where pictures of these planes would be taken from the sides of the airport and would get into newspapers. This sort of thing did not happen in Madras. We, like the rest of South Asia, were under "voluntary departure." I'm not quite sure why they thought anybody in Madras consular district would be hurt. None of my staff went home. They didn't send any children home or anything like that, but it was offered. We were not allowed to bring families in. My new political economic officer arrived in February of '91, and her husband, who had knocked about all over the world and was in his 50s, couldn't come, because he was a dependent. He could only come months later even though the war was basically over by then. This sort of thing disrupted our life for the newcomers who came to post in that off season, the winter of '90-'91. But basically the war did not have a tremendous effect on us.

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*Q: There were no political buttons that were being pushed, demonstrations against America on generic terms?*

HECK: Only very small ones and nothing that made a whit of difference, nothing that was at all of concern. There were a few who for political reasons wanted to demonstrate their solidarity with the Iraqis, but it wasn't big. It made almost no difference. There was much more of that in New Delhi and in Bombay, where there was a much larger Iraqi community. We just didn't have any. There were very few Iraqis in the district, and I'm sure you could count them on your hands and toes. It was not important to us other than it disrupted our lives in other ways.

*Q: Did you travel to all the states and make calls all the time?*

HECK: Oh, yes, of course. There was a great deal of that, usually by airplane. As I said, the closest capital of the other states was in Bangalore, and that was a seven-hour drive. I've done it often enough, but it was not a nice, easy drive, so usually by plane. I was on the road it seemed like all the time. The second part of my tour, when Tom Pickering came, then I was on the road all the time with Tom Pickering, because, as you may have heard, the Pickerings are inveterate travelers by land. They believe in driving, and they have driven across Africa and Russia and India and every country that they have ever served in. It was great fun having him because of all the traveling that we did. But I remember it drove the security people in New Delhi just bananas. I'm not quite sure whether they thought the robbers were going to attack us on the road or whatever, but we drove once from Hyderabad down to Madras, which was a very long two-day drive, and we drove from Madras to Bangalore over to Kerala and up and down the coast of Kerala. That was another two-day drive, coming back to get the car home. This sort of thing, we did a lot of that, and it was great fun.

*Q: Are there any other sort of elements that we should cover?*



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HECK: Well, one thing that I would want to mention, I suppose, because in the north and the west and even a bit in the east in my last year there was a tremendous political brouhaha which caused religious riots and great destruction. In Bombay, for instance, there was a lot of burning of Muslim properties. This all started because there is a mosque in UP, in Uttar Pradesh, in north India which was called the Baberamoched after Baber, the first of the Mogul emperors. Some Indians believed that it was built on the site of the birthplace of Lord Shiva, who is a mythological god, at a place called Iodja in UP. The party now in power, the BJP, the Bharatiya Junata Party, is a very conservative party and very, very Hindu. It's trying hard now to become more multireligious but it has a strong basis in what you might call fundamental Hinduism, if there is such a thing. So a number of the strict fundamentalists in the BJP were demanding that India tear down this 16th century mosque and build a temple to Lord Shiva on the property. This argument had started when Jawaharlal Nehru was prime minister, and he died in 1963, so this has gone on a long, long time. But for years and years it had been locked. The government just solved the whole problem by closing it to everybody. That was being changed, and pressure was building up, and there were demonstrations in the north. Well, ultimately some of the hot-blooded types in the BJP overwhelmed the policemen and they started tearing the building down, and the next thing you knew the whole building was torn down, and they the riots started. A lot of Islamic sites got attacked, and there were huge demonstrations. People were killed. Buildings were burned. It was very messy in north India and in Bombay and in other places in the north and center part of the country. People in New Delhi, including the government of India, just couldn't understand why none of this made any difference in the south. It really didn't. This never affected us, and there are some really fundamental reasons for it. One of them is that Lord Ram - I had said Shiva before, it's Lord Ram, but it doesn't matter - the point was that Lord Ram is an incarnation of Vishnu, and Vishnu is the major one of the triumvirate of three Hindu deities in north India. Lord Vishnu has 10 incarnations, one of whom is the Buddha and one of whom

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is Krishna and one of whom is Ram, and Ram, of course, is a very big hero in Indian mythology who saved the country from the Dravidians, because he got his- (end of tape)

In any case, Ram is Vishnu, and Vishnu is the most important deity in the north, but in the south it's Lord Shiva, who is one of the others of the three of the triumvirate of three, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. It would be sort of like having a big Catholic-Protestant argument in the north and in the south having a completely different religion, Taoism. It just didn't connect, and so people didn't demonstrate. Nobody was hurting Muslims, nobody was rioting in the streets, nobody was doing anything. Neither our embassy could understand this nor could the government of India seem to understand the differences that existed between north and south on this thing.

*Q: Did you get any high-level visits at all or Congressional visits or anything?*

HECK: We got a certain number of them. I had Larry Pressler once for five or six days.

*Q: A Congressman?*

HECK: He was a Senator from South Dakota. We had Steve Solarz, of course, who was still the chair of the committee, the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee for South Asia, or for all of Asia for that matter, in the House. We had a high-level delegation led by Senator Boren of Oklahoma, who was at that point the chair of the Intelligence Committee of the Senate, and he brought a group of his Senators from the Intelligence Committee, Carl Levin and Claiborne Pell - I'm trying to remember, there were about six of them. But basically, we had visits from government officials, American government officials. We had businesspeople. The members of Congress tended to go to Bombay if they left Delhi. In the consular district, the place they wanted to go most was Bangalore and that area, and sometimes they would fly into Bangalore and I would meet them up there, but basically we did not have a tremendous number of Legislative Branch visitors. We had more military, we had quite a bit of military at various times. We had the Coast Guard. We had ships visits in the region. But, no, we did not have a tremendous amount. Larry Pressler's was

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particularly interesting to me, because we were able to get into a base which is used on the southeastern coast of India just where Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh come together, very near that, and it's a place where they tested Indian rockets. Just to be able to get into that was a tremendous coup. Nobody had been in that place, I mean from the U.S. government, for years. Now I don't think that Larry Pressler and I knew what we were looking at particularly. It was not like having the head of one of our atomic energy organizations looking at it, but it was an interesting opportunity to see a part of India that I did not see very often.

*Q: How did you feel about the diplomatic process there?*

HECK: I enjoyed my tour there, but I must say that I much prefer embassies. I missed the political input on things. Over the course of the years that I have been in India, we have changed, the United States government has changed, tremendously. Its interest has dropped in things political. We, as the State Department, as the Foreign Service, are no longer covering Indian politics the way we did 30-some years before. It really doesn't matter very much about Indian politics. The government is a democracy. It is run out of New Delhi, and the permutations and the convoluted processes of various state governments are not important as the way it seemed to be to us in the 1960s when the Cold War was on.

*Q: Everything was important. Kerala - I've never been to India, but I certainly know of that place.*

HECK: Because of the Communist Party, that's right. But it doesn't matter anymore. To us now Kerala is the place that a lot of American nurses come from. We get a tremendous amount of nurses out of Kerala.

*Q: Where did the patels of the motels come from?*

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HECK: The patels of the motels come from Gujarat. That's western India. There are lots of patels in Bombay, and, of course, Bombay until a few years - well, relatively speaking in Indian terms - until 30 years ago or so was basically a Gujarati city and not a Maharashtra city. So the politics didn't matter, and, of course, I had somebody to cover the politics. I found that the ceremonial side of it kind of bored me. All of the ribbons that I cut and all of the speeches that I read and all of the interminable openings that I went to were particularly awful under my first chief minister in Madras and Tamil Nadu, because he was a strong believer in auspicious times and non-auspicious times. He would be invited to an opening of something that would be at eleven o'clock, and this man would whip in at 12:30 or 1:00 and we would have been sitting under a shamiana, which is a tent, in the hot sun for an hour and a half waiting for it to be auspicious again so that he could join us. This sort of thing used to just drive me nuts, because this always seemed to be on weekends that I was seated in the sun waiting for this man. I must say that Jayalalitha was a little bit better on that. When she said she would be there at a certain hour, she was there at a certain hour, but even so. I did an awful lot of escorting of various embassy visitors and Washington visitors and so on to meet various governors and chief ministers and chief secretaries. I got very adept at getting around for state and one territorial governmental sets of offices, but it always seemed as if we were having the same conversation for the eighteenth time and nobody really cared in New Delhi what was said on this and certainly not in Washington. The reporting that was done from the field was also... The longer I was there, the more Delhi wanted it all routed through them first rather than our being able to send things directly to Washington. I felt constricted by that to some extent. So I enjoyed my time there, but three years was certainly adequate. I was glad that I left when I did. But it was a beautiful place. The area is fascinating. People were terribly friendly. I have nothing but good memories of my time there really.

*Q: Was the food good?*

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HECK: If you like Indian food, it's completely different than north Indian food. It's strongly vegetarian in at least parts of it. I can eat chilis till the cows come home, but there's one part of Andhra Pradesh where I can't quite get through some of the food because it is so hot, truly hot, to the point that a course called curd rice is always the last thing served. They give you sort of a half and half of boiled white rice and yogurt, the idea being that it takes the last of the heat out of your mouth. But, yes, I like south Indian food.

*Q: Well, in '93 you went where?*

HECK: In '93 I returned to Washington until my retirement in 1997. So I was here for four years, two years in Personnel and two years as the office director in East Asia Pacific for regional security affairs.

*Q: Personnel, what were you doing?*

HECK: In Personnel I was on the Board of Directors. I came back on rather short notice. I was supposed to be on my way to South Africa. Then for personal reasons, because I had had a long illness, my husband had had a long illness, and I could not return to the United States during his lifetime. When he died, I asked and was given permission to come back to Washington rather than going to South Africa, because I had been out at that point for eleven years and I had not really been home to the United States because I could not leave him, which meant that I didn't really have home leaves. I would come to Washington for two or three days for a consultation and get a dispensation from the State Department to avoid having the three weeks of home leave. So I wanted to come back, and I did. By this time it was February of the year and, of course, all the assignments had been done. I was put into the Board of Examiners, because it was one of the few things they could do for me at that time, and I found that I loved it. I really enjoyed it, and I stayed an extra year because I was having such fun. One of the reasons was that we traveled all over the United States to interview people, and I had not traveled in the United States. First of all, I had been unable to travel for eleven years, but I hadn't seen much of the country

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since I was a college student, and I just thought it was time to know my own country again, and I really enjoyed the two-week periods we'd have in Los Angeles or Boston or Atlanta or wherever, to just get to know another part of the country. So that was a very, very enjoyable time.

*Q: What was your impression of the Foreign Service candidates during this '93 to '95 period?*

HECK: How few of them could write. I mean they were obviously very bright or they wouldn't have passed the written exam in the first place. The orals were at that point a one-day process which had been fashioned because of court cases. Both outside contractors, people who deal in exams, as well as the State Department and the Foreign Service itself had spent a number of years trying to determine the best way to test orally possible candidates. In the early '90s they sent questionnaires to all junior officers around the world, as I understand it, and to supervisors of those junior officers asking about what the junior officers did and what they needed to do, what they needed to know when they took the job as opposed to what they could learn on the job. They asked the same sorts of questions of all of the supervisors about what was necessary for the person coming into the Service to do. Then the exam had been very carefully crafted to try to touch on all those buttons, including having to see how these people wrote. Did the exam work? Well, it was an imperfect exam, and I understand it has changed since I left it in '95. I think we found out that the one weakest part of it was to test about how these people interacted with other people, their interpersonal relations, their interpersonal skills. There were parts of the exam which were designed to do just that. But in looking back on it, I think that what we saw was a lot of smart people being able to be very nice to each other for a specific six- or eight-hour period of time. We heard later from the people who ran the junior officer corps, from people who worked with them in the field, from various embassies and consulates around the world that the weakest thing about the junior officers tended to be in some cases - not the majority, God knows - but there some spectacular lapses, I think, you know, where somebody got through this net and then got out to a post which might have

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been rather difficult and it was just disaster because of his inability or her inability to work with other people. I don't want to exaggerate this, because, believe me, this is just a minor part of it, but I think it was perhaps the area in which it was the hardest to test. How does one test an ability of a person to get along with other people short of seeing them in some difficult situations over a period of time? We were not set up to do that. Now I'm not sure how they work on this problem now, but I know that that was a place where we could have perhaps done better. But we got some marvelous candidates. It was an interesting period also, because when you and I came into the Service, there were age limits. It was either 32 or you had to be under your 32nd birthday or your 33rd birthday, etc., etc. Because of court cases, we were taking people of any age basically. The top line for the oral exam at that point was 59 under normal circumstances, and the reason for this as I understand it was that this would give a person who came in then five years to invest into the retirement system so that they would then have a pension as opposed to have to take the money back that they had put into their pension. But there were exceptions to this also. A case in point was a case that was going on throughout my time in Personnel involving USIA women. A case had been taken to court about civil servants, women, in USIA in a period in the late '60s and early '70s. It was claimed, and the court agreed, that the exam had been unfair for women for civil service positions in USIA at that period. For some reason the judge threw into the determination - or perhaps USIA just chose to do this, I really don't know, but they decided to do this for women in the Foreign Service also - so all the women who had failed the written exam, because it was the case of the written exam not being fair to women, all the women who had failed the exam in that period, which was from like '68 to '72, whatever, were offered a chance to take an oral exam and compete for 90 positions which they would be given, and age didn't matter for that, so they could be anything, they could be 68 or 73 or whatever and still take it if they so wished. So it was just a different Foreign Service. But we did take in a lot of people who were starting their second career and people up to 59. I'm not sure but I assume this continues to go on. I always kind of worried about it, although I'm all in favor of nondiscriminatory policy and all of this, but at the same time, these poor people were basically being sent to visa mills,



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large consular posts where the work is very rapid paced and very, very intense, places like Manila and Mexican posts, border posts, the Dominican Republic, India, where the line is three blocks long by two a.m. and you just are on your feet all day long and doing NIVs, non-immigrant visas. I think for some of the people we took, that must have been certainly not what they expected. I remember a college professor who had just retired from I think the University of Washington in Seattle. I mean, what's a full professor who had been an important personage in his department going to do at the age of 59, which is what he was? He was, I think, sent to the Philippines. I just felt that that seemed like a very difficult thing to expect of a man of that age and who had had an important position to suddenly be fodder for this mill.

*Q: Well, did you have trouble in the oral exam, because in a way they are put up in group exercises and all? The difference between the college kid and a 55-year-old man or woman - I would think that it would be hard. These are really apples and oranges.*

HECK; Yes, they are, and one of our biggest - I'm not sure if this is an apple or an orange - but we could always tell, or almost always tell, the Georgetown University students, because Georgetown University School of Foreign Service has quite a library. Anybody who takes the exam, I gather, from Georgetown goes back and regurgitates as much as possible that he can remember about the format and the questions and the various exercises and so on, and some of those kids, boy, were they ever smooth. They had really practiced this stuff. But, you're right. It's very hard for a person who has been a colonel in the Army or something to play this sort of game with a bunch of 25-year-olds without looking like he's somewhat impatient with them. It's just human nature being what it is. It's difficult, it really is.

*Q: What about the minorities, particularly blacks? Were you having to treat these with special care?*

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HECK: The Foreign Service, certainly when I was in Personnel and I think going clear back to when I came into the Service, I remember their efforts in the early '60s to bring people in from other than WASP, northeastern America sort of backgrounds. But I think the Foreign Service has worked very hard in bringing in minorities. It hasn't succeeded particularly well. First of all, for minority purposes, excluding women, if you can call that a minority, because they did count women as a separate group sometimes, but we have Spanish-speaking people. Hispanics can be anyplace that speaks Spanish. I remember passing once a Chinese person, a Chinese American, and after we'd passed him, we found out that he was on the Hispanic quota. You can be on the Hispanic quota; all you have to do is say that you're Hispanic. And he was indeed a Hispanic in that his family had come from China after the revolution and they had gone to Nicaragua, and he was born in Nicaragua and his first language was Spanish. So he was on the Hispanic quota even though he certainly didn't look Hispanic by my way of thinking. So you have Hispanic, you have Asian Americans, you have Native Americans, and you have African Americans. We almost never got a Native American. They didn't even come into the process as far as I know. I don't know how many might have taken the written, but there weren't very many. The Asian Americans had a higher percentage pass than the percentage of Asian Americans in the United States, so ethnically, I guess you could say, Asian Americans are a minority, but they certainly did not fit the concept of a minority in that sense in that they passed beautifully. Hispanics, we were always trying to get more Hispanics. The people who did recruitment, who were all civil servants, concentrated a great deal on what I consider to be small colleges and universities in the Southwest. These people, I am told by Hispanic friends of mine who had gone along on some of these trips occasionally, either were not interested or could not pass the written exam because the schools that they went to were not particularly strong.

*Q: That's true of some of the black...*

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HECK: Where we get our good candidates in minorities tend to be from big state institutions and from Ivy League private schools around the country, this sort of thing, but it's not from a small teaching college in the foothills of some mountain range in northern New Mexico. These are students from better universities and colleges or who have had life experience, because now we're taking people from all sorts of backgrounds. As you know, people can learn things anywhere. They don't have to have gone to any college. So our statistics on Hispanics were lower than they should have been if you say that statistics should equal the number of Hispanics in the United States, which I gather is rapidly getting to be more than the number of African Americans in the U.S. By the way, on the Hispanics, I know that the recruitment people worked closely with - there's a Hispanic-American caucus on the Hill in the House - they worked with them, and we reported regularly to them about our efforts and where we had sent people for recruitment and all of this sort of thing, how many people we had spoken to, and so on. On the African Americans, the statistics were not nearly as good as we should have had considering the number of African Americans in the country and the African Americans with higher education. We worked very hard on that. I remember the first year I was in this job, the office in which I was assigned brought in a whole passel of retirees who were African American and they were to concentrate on making phone calls and urging people who had passed the written exam to come in for the orals. Then, when somebody didn't show up, they called back to find out why they hadn't shown up, and just generally encouraged them, tried to take the extra step to explain that there was a great interest in getting them and that they would have interesting careers and so on. It was, I don't know, moderately successful and no more than that, maybe not even that, I'm not sure. But the bottom line - and this is where we fail on minorities, I think - has to do with our general process of bringing in new members of the Foreign Service officers organization or group, and that is that the process takes months usually, like over a year. Eighteen months was, while I was there, very common. I guess it's a bit lower now, because they're not having to get top secret clearances anymore for these people. As long as they're on probation until they reach tenure, they're only having to have a secret clearance, and that means only a five-

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year check instead of a fifteen, and that speeds up the process. But the bottom line is that times are good now; kids, young people, anybody who has a certain amount of education and a certain amount of drive can get a job relatively rapidly, relatively easily, and we are competing, the Foreign Service is competing, with lots of big companies as well as educational institutions and institutes and think tanks and so on for minorities. Everybody wants diversity in the workplace. This is a very important part of employment now and of hiring. If you are a minority candidate and you are on the list to come into the Foreign Service and you know it's going to take 18 months for your security clearance and your medical clearance and all these checks and this and that and then wait for the class, are you going to do that, or are you going to take the \$74,000 that some big firm in New York offers you and go to work in two weeks? So we're losing. The same thing can be said of the white male candidates, I suppose, but we start with a bigger pool of them. So we have more numbers to draw on. When numbers one, three and five drop out, we can go down to number 250, whereas if we only have ten black candidates on the register and they all get picked up by IBM, it doesn't leave much for us. I think we really need to address as a service the issue of how to handle this, because I think diversity is important, I think it's good for us overseas as well as for us here in the United States. I think it is important that we show the broad base that we have of people of every color, religion and so on from around the world in our Foreign Service. I really like that concept, but we're having trouble on that one point. It's not everyone who can say, all right, I'll work on my Ph.D. while I'm waiting for this or I'll work on my master's degree, or my family has the money, I can be an intern for a year and a half on the Hill. It doesn't happen. Most people have a life to lead and they want to get ahead with it, so that hurts us.

*Q: Well, in '95 you moved over to...*

HECK: I moved over to East Asia Pacific to be the office director of Regional Security Policy for East Asia Pacific. The name is not exactly indicative of what we do. In other bureaus it had been regional affairs offices, and East Asia Pacific had changed the name of it because the major focus of it was the security ties we have through ASEAN,

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the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. There is a large group of the important countries of the world who work very closely with ASEAN and who meet at the foreign minister level once a year with ASEAN. There are many, many other meetings during the course of the year, and they all focus on security in its very broadest sense. So this office had as its major account dealings with ASEAN of all sorts. It also had, as any regional service office would have, a colonel, a military officer, who handled military issues of training in Indonesia or sending American aircraft carriers through the Taiwan Strait when the Chinese started lobbing missiles out into the sea near Taiwan. It handled the State Department's dealing with CINCPAC, the command in the Pacific which is based in Hawaii. It handled a lot of confidence-building meetings with countries that dealt with ASEAN, and when I say this, I mean by that the major non-ASEAN powers of the Pacific Rim, China, Japan, Korea, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and, just because it shares an island with Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Those were from one side, and then the European Union was involved in this as the European Union would send to the various meetings a triumvirate, a troika, of whoever the present, past and future presidents of the European Union were at that particular moment. Preparing the annual meeting that the Secretary of State goes to at the end of July every year takes a tremendous amount of logistics and a tremendous amount of time and reams and reams of paper, as do the various confidence-building meetings. We had triangular meetings with Russia - well, Russia, Japan and Korea, for instance, the United States, Australia. We have once every year to 18 months security meetings that involve Japan, South Korea, Canada, the United States and Australia. I've been to those. I have been to NATO to give briefings on Asian affairs. In the case of the NATO meetings, there is a NATO meeting twice a year which the State Department Intelligence Office for the region and the Regional Affairs Office go back and forth on. So the one that I went to was the one that was more open and, therefore, less classified and involved all of the so-called friends of NATO, which means the entire Eastern European countryside which would like to join NATO but hasn't so far. The three who will be joining in 1999 plus all of the others who want to join at some future date would be there, and they would probably jump on me before any other questions and it would

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usually be on China and American policy with China followed by American policy with North Korea. But we did also other kinds of things that had to do with confidence building. My office was involved in a number of things having to do with how to handle North Korea. Is North Korea ever going to explode, implode, fall apart; how to save the situation from having a violent reaction on the Korean Peninsula? So there was an awful lot of paper that moves through this office, and we did an awful lot of traveling. My particular spring of 1997 just before I left, I crossed the Atlantic Ocean four times and the Pacific Ocean as far as Malaysia eight times in a period of three months. On one awful trip I got back from Sydney, Australia, at nine o'clock at night and at two o'clock the next afternoon I was at the airport to go to Brussels for NATO, and I couldn't combine the trips because it was two separate bureaus. I was in the back of an airplane for so many hundreds of hours that I don't even want to think about it. I can tell you that from my home to the hotel I used in Singapore is 29 hours door to door, and that's a very long trip when you go straight through, and you went straight through all of the time. The State Department by this point - well, of course, the rules depend on the bureau; different bureaus do things different ways - at least for EAP, office directors could not use business class. It was only assistant secretaries and deputy assistant secretaries who could, and this made sense for the Bureau, because everywhere was a long way from Washington for EAP. So the costs, if they had let office directors or others use business class, would have just been out of sight, so I see the economic reasons for doing it. But they didn't like us flying through Hawaii, because it costs a little bit more. We could not stop on the West Coast, because that was less than seven hours. It only takes six hours when you're flying east to west to get to Los Angeles or San Francisco. So you couldn't have a rest stop on the West Coast and you couldn't go to Hawaii for a rest stop, so your first rest stop would be Tokyo, and Tokyo from Chicago over the Pole is 12 hours plus what it takes to get to Chicago, so you were already two-thirds of the way there by the time you put in your hours and sat around airports in Chicago. One hesitated to stop in Japan anyway, because the prices were so high and it was taking money out of the budget, so it was very hard travel, very hard travel. We shared the travel. There were six of us in this office, and it was not just me.

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*Q: I'm trying to figure out. This is defense. You've got this peculiar thing in East Asia where obviously if you've got to make up a power that you've got to keep an eye on, it's China, because nobody else is particularly doing anything there. How do you deal with it when the same time China isn't making any particularly threatening noises except around Taiwan, and obviously you've got North Korea but that's almost a separate thing?*

HECK: China was, and remains I'm sure, by far the most important account for EAP. Well, perhaps that's not true, because Japan has been a particular ally and a major world economic power for so many years. But in terms of concern about what might happen in the future, I think China would probably win. But the most dangerous by far is the Korean Peninsula in terms of flash points that we might face at some point. We've got 100,000 troops in East Asia, 38,000 about in South Korea, another 30-some in Japan, and then a tremendous amount on ships in various oceans at various times, so it's a major security issue for us. I think that all of the countries in the region, with the exception perhaps of North Korea but maybe not even that, but certainly including China, despite what they may say publicly, really do want us in the region. We are seen as a counterbalance against whoever the perceived problem is. For many, including China, Japan is a major concern. It's only been 50 years since the war, and a couple of very old countries have very long memories. So China would see us as possibly being able to maintain sanity and keep military growth out of Japan. North Korea and South Korea obviously like to see the United States as possibly being a buffer there somewhere between Taiwan and China. The Southeast Asians like the idea of having American interest in the region because of Japan, because of China. They both have intruded into things Southeast Asian in the last 60 years. So I think our presence militarily is appreciated, and certainly our presence in the ASEAN connection is appreciated. The one country, by the way, I forgot to mention as a member currently of this group that meets with ASEAN once a year is India. There have been varying degrees of interest shown by a whole series of countries which would like to join in the same sort of thing, and so far at least ASEAN has held the line, and I think they will particularly now that they have their own problems to deal with economically. They're



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not at all interested in meetings for the sake of meetings anymore, I suspect, and certainly not in terms of increasing the size of this. Pakistan wanted to join. Tajikistan wanted to join. Kazakhstan wanted to join. Mongolia wants to join, and in fact the United States likes the idea of Mongolia being in, because if Russia is in and China is in, what's in between the two and it's Mongolia. But all of this can be quite arcane. Meetings have a life of their own, as you know.

*Q: I was just wondering. It sounds like, you know, you're having meetings. Was this hand holding or what were you doing?*

HECK: A lot of it is confidence building in all sorts of ways. There are actually meetings called confidence-building meetings, but in the larger sense getting to know each other better is part of it. For us, showing that we're interested in the region is part of it. The ASEAN countries want our participation. They want to be assured that we and others are interested in what's going on in their part of the world. When we were in Saigon, Stu, I remember Ambassador Bunker holding a reception for the foreign ministers, at least for the Allied foreign ministers from that meeting who had come to Saigon after they had had a meeting with ASEAN somewhere else. Do you remember this? I remember escorting the New Zealand Prime Minister around at a reception. I think it's important for us, it's one way for us, to show our interest in the region and in a region that, until the economic problems that began in the summer of '97, I think the area felt very strongly that perhaps we as a government were not necessarily as interested as we should be in the region. They wanted to get the United States to pay attention, and this was one way, to have the Secretary of State go out and spend three days or whatever at the meeting, wherever it might be that year, and that meant that he or she would then go to other places in the region, and it led to a whole series of high-level encounters which, in fact, did all sorts of things. For the United States it was a chance, in my years at least, to have good bilateral discussions which might not be able to be held otherwise, specifically with China. Before I took the job or at the beginning of the year that I took the job, I guess, was the time that President Lee of Taiwan came to the United States, and you will remember how very

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upset China was about this when President Lee of Taiwan was supposedly just going to his alumni gathering and instead turned it into a political set of meetings and had the press following him around. The mainland Chinese were livid, and relations with China just went down the tube. The following year the meetings in Brunei - now wait a minute, it happened that year. The next year it was in Jakarta, but in any case, these meetings where Secretary Christopher came was really the first decent chance for us to engage the Chinese at the level of Secretary of State in the course of what had been almost a year. So it was very important to us from the bilateral point of view. Both Mr. Christopher and Mrs. Albright have attended tremendous numbers of bilateral serious meetings on other subjects with particularly Russia and China but also with all of the other foreign ministers who are there. We used it in that year in Jakarta to put real arm twisting on the Indian Foreign Minister, who was also the Indian Prime Minister - it was I. K. Gujral at the time - on nuclear nonproliferation, and particularly on signing the NPT.

*Q: Non-Proliferation Treaty.*

HECK: Non-Proliferation Treaty. It didn't do much good, and of course by the next May another government was in, and the Indians and the Pakistanis had both blown up their nuclear devices, and so I guess it didn't take. But I mean we used these meetings for very important bilateral discussions that perhaps we would not have been able to do on the fringes, on the margins, of the United Nations, which would have been the next chance. We also from this office did cover the United Nations in large part, sending notetakers up to New York to do various and sundry meetings of the Secretary of State and so on. The Secretary of State has traditionally, at least through my period, given a breakfast for the East Asian counterparts, the East Asian foreign minister. I think the hardest notetaking I had ever done in my life was at a long, narrow breakfast table with 18 people, when protocol puts you at the very end somewhere and you're having to hear these very soft-spoken Asians, in some cases ones with strong accents or speaking through an

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interpreter, and you're having to do all of this over the clinking of glasses and the serving of breakfasts and coffee cups being hit down into the saucers and so on. It was not easy.

*Q: What about the Korean situation during the two years you were there? What was the general feeling about that area?*

HECK: Well, here again you have desks. There was a Korea desk which covered both North and South Korea. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, who was responsible for regional affairs, also was responsible for Japan and Korea, and, in the case of the person who was there when I was there, had been the deputy chief of mission in Korea, and so he spent a tremendous amount of time on this. On Korea, somewhat like China, a lot of the material was so highly classified that it did not get widespread circulation in the bureau. Listening to some of the conversations that we would have at staff meetings with this particular Deputy Assistant Secretary and his office directors, we didn't get much involved in Korea other than working on some of the papers that had to do with how to handle North Korea. There we were certainly not in the lead; the Korean desk was and did the primary drafting. We did a certain amount of hand holding for the Korean Embassy about various issues that mattered to it. Both Korea and Japan tended to turn to us for reassurances on anything that was sort of multilateral, that we would protect their interests, that we would stick to their point of view on issues. We did have, during the period I was on the desk, a state visit of the President of Korea, another President Kim, but the Korean desk handled that. We were not closely involved in this. There was a great deal of admiration, as far as I could tell, for the current President Kim.

*Q: Kim Day Jung.*

HECK: Yes, Kim Day Jung and his election, and appreciation of some of the suffering that he had gone through to get to that point, and appreciation also of some of the magnanimity that he showed upon election. For instance, we had one officer who did human rights, which was a big portfolio. He did labor and human rights, as a matter of fact, and he was

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greatly involved in all that sort of thing. We had narcotics, another big issue, because that brought in Burma, but, of course, the Burma desk was also very involved in that. But it was very much of an office that did a wide variety of things.

*Q: How did you work with both the Assistant Secretary and whoever was the Deputy Assistant Secretary? Who were they?*

HECK: The Assistant Secretary until early January of 1997 was Winston Lord, a dear, kind man who was really interested in the multilateral issues. He had been a junior personage with Kissinger in the early '70s when Kissinger went secretly to open China ahead of Richard Nixon, and he had been in and out of government at various levels. He remains a Republican, so perhaps that did not put him in the absolute center of the various office politics that went on in a Democratic administration. But I enjoyed him so very much, and I liked working for him and with him, and I thought he was just a...

*Q: I'm doing a long series of interviews with him now.*

HECK: He's remarkably kind and a decent man. When he left in January until I retired - well, I left the office in September - we sort of fell between stools. Officially I reported, my office reported, to Charles Cartman, who was the senior DAS for the Bureau, Deputy Assistant Secretary, and whose other responsibilities were two of our very biggest accounts, which were Korea and Japan, plus the other sort of regional-type issues. By that I mean public affairs and so on. But he was interested most of all in Korea and Japan. He had served in both. He was, is, remains, a specialist in both, and our relations with both are so important that this absorbed all of his time. He really had almost no time and, I think, almost no interest in these other accounts. He was in the process of dividing them up among - by the time I left he had decided that part of my office would report to him and part of my office would report to another deputy assistant secretary on the ASEAN-related issues. This does not work. You cannot take an office and have the office directors and three people going one direction and somebody else going in another. Chain of command

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wise, I was very upset about that, but there was nothing I could do about it, and I was leaving.

*Q: Then you left in 1997?*

HECK: I retired in 1997. I took the retirement course and officially retired on January 3, 1998.

*Q: Well, there we are.*

HECK: There we are.

*Q: Very good, great.*

End of interview